DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 614 CS 507 961

TITLE	Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (75th, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, August 5-8, 1992). Part VII: Television.
INSTITUTION	Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.
PUB DATE	Aug 92
NOTE	265p.; For other sections of these proceedings, see CS 507 955-970. For 1991 Proceedings, see ED 340 045. Some pages contain light type.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC11 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Cable Television; Censorship; Foreign Countries; Mass Media Effects; *Mass Media Role; News Reporting; Programing (Broadcast); Sex Differences; Television Research; *Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS	CNN World Report; Congress; Gulf War; King (Rodney); Local News; Media Coverage; News Releases; *Television News

ABSTRACT

The Television section of the proceedings contains the following 10 papers: "Financial Commitment and Performance in Local Television News: Applying the Industrial Organizational Model" (Angela Powers); "The Relationship between Censorship and the Emotional and Critical Tone of Television News Coverage of the Persian Gulf War" (John E. Newhagen); "The Dynamics of Television Program Audience Accumulation" (Guy E. Lometti and others); "Development Orientation of Domestic and International News on the CNN World Report" (Chun-il Park and others); "How Cable Television Network Programming Strategies Affect Time Spent Viewing" (Beth E. Barnes); "The Rodney King Tape and the Viewer's Role in the Rituals of TV News--Seeing Was Believing" (Sandra Haarsager); "Video News Releases: Breaching the Covenant with Viewers" (Travis Linn); "Filling the Gap: Congress Increases Its Video as TV News Cuts Budgets" (Floyd J. McKay); "The Ceremonial of Television News Sweeps: 'Series Sleaze' and 'Series Stress'" (Matthew C. Ehrlich); and "Behind the Bleeps: Organizational Processes and the Roles of the Network Television Censors" (John Weispfenning). (RS)

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION IN JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

(75th, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, August 5-8, 1992).

Part VII: Television.

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Financial Commitment and Performance in Local Television News: Applying the Industrial Organizational Model

by

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Summer 1992

Presented to the Management and Economics Division of the AEJMC at the annual convention in Montreal, Canada, August 5-8, 1992.

ABSTRACT

Financial Commitment and Performance in Local Television News: Applying the Industrial Organizational Model

New technology and intense competition is redefining the role of television news. This study provides support for using the industrial organization model to examine performance of local television news under these changing conditions.

While previous research has established a relationship between competition and financial commitment to news, it has failed to address the relationship between financial commitment and performance. In this study, a positive relationship was found between the market structure variable of competition and the conduct variable of resources allocated to the newsroom. In addition, results indicated a relationship between competition and the performance variable of increased viewership.

These findings suggest that when local television news programs are highly competitive, additional financial resources are likely to be committed to the news product. More importantly, results suggest that intense competition in local television news results in increased viewership for everyone.

Financial Commitment and Performance in Local Television News: Applying the Industrial Organizational Model

The advent of innovations such as fiber optics, 150-channel cable systems, and direct broadcast satellites has opened a massive flow of news and information into viewers' homes. As the number of news and information programs continues to grow, concern has been expressed about the effect of increased competition on conduct and performance of local television news departments. Where television news is concerned, will growing diversity, niche programming, and overall increased competition result in increased financial commitment to news, which, in turn, will satisfy additional viewers' needs for more depth coverage and greater sense of news context?

Research into newspaper competition indicates that intense competition increases the amount of money spent on the news-editorial budget (Litman and Bridges, 1986; Lacy, 1987 and 1990). Yet, in the broadcast industry, trade articles suggest that since the late 1980's pressure has intensified to tighten broadcast newsroom budgets (Button, 1987). This profit orientation has been termed the "corporatization of American journalism" (Kwitny, 1990).

The purpose of this paper is to take an exploratory look at the relationship between conduct measures, such as television news departments' financial commitment to news, and performance measures, such as ratings. Previous research has identified relationships between competition measures and conduct measures. However, the question remains as to whether or not a relationship exists between financial commitment to television news and overall performance of news departments. To address this question, the industrial organization model will be applied in this current study.

Background

The industrial organization model is derived from microeconomic theory and is useful in evaluating the market forces affecting how firms and entire markets function. According to the model, market structure determines market conduct, thereby affecting market performance.

In general, market structure is defined as the organization of a market with an emphasis on sellers and buyers, product differentiation, barriers to entry, cost structure and vertical integration as key variables (Caves, 1987). For local television news, market structure has been defined in terms of oligopoly theory, where there are few sellers and where sellers produce somewhat differentiated products (Litman, 1980; Prisuta, 1979). However, with additional news programs from cable and independent stations entering the market with network affiliation news programs (Broadcasting, 1987 and 1990, Katz, 1992), the number of sellers of local news is no longer limited, resulting in increased competition (Powers, 1990). As such, competition intensity and size of market were the market structure variables examined in this study. Competition intensity was selected because research reviewed indicates that resource allocation is affected by competition (Litman and Bridges, 1986; Lacy et al., 1989). The level of resources can enhance or constrain news gathering. Size of market was included as a control variable because larger markets generally have more resources available than do smaller markets.

Conduct refers to the way sellers and buyers act in the market. Relevant conduct variables include pricing behavior, product strategy, research and innovation, and advertising. Two market conduct variables were selected for this study. Hours of news per day was one conduct variable studied since it may affect the extent of the news coverage and the number of people who can be exposed to the coverage. Although hours of news as a conduct variable for televisions news has never been studied, similar conduct variables have been studied within the newspaper industry. Litman and Bridges (1986) found that competitive newspaper had larger newsholes. This indicated that competitive newspapers increased expenditures on the information product to attract readers.

Hours of news is also an important variable to study because the question is raised as to whether an increase in news time results in an increase in quality or ratings. Bernstein, et al. (1990) found that the increased length of some newscasts are devoted to primarily non-local coverage. They suggest that "stations expanding their newscast length do not increase their staff enough to fill the added space with an equivalent amount of local news" (Bernstein, et al., 1990, p. 670).

Size of newsroom staff was the second conduct variable studied. Previous studies have indicated that staff sizes were positively correlated with performance in the newspaper industry (Lacy et al., 1989). To date, this relationship has not been studied within the local television news industry. However, as Bernstein, et al. indicate, this relationship merits examination.

Performance is defined by how well an organization achieves its goals (Caves, 1987; Busterna, 1988a). The prime goal of a television news department is to attract viewers to sell advertising time. Since ratings are a primary means of measuring the success of their goal, they were used as a performance variable. Hurwitz states that ratings "stand as a symbol of the commitment and success of broadcast and advertising managers" (Hurwitz, 1984, p. 205).

This study identified variables relating to competition in local television news markets that fit within the three subdivisions of the industrial organizational model. These variables were then tested empirically to determine whether the structure variables affected the conduct variables and whether the conduct variables are related to the performance variables.

Other variables such as budget, number of news bureaus, and type of news coverage may be related to structure, conduct and performance. These also need examination. However, as a starting point, this exploratory study uses variables that have some justification in literature.

Literature Review

Various studies on the economics of media markets have indicated a relationship between competition and conduct. Litman (1979) found that an increase in competition between television networks resulted in increased programming expenditures. Competition was defined as how compressed were the ratings of network programming. The closer the ratings point were between the three networks, the greater was the level of competition.

Wirth and Wollert (1984) studied the effect of competition on television news advertising prices. Competition was defined as the number of television stations operating within a market. Results indicated that stations that operated in markets with less competition charged higher news prices.

Busterna (1980 and 1988a) used competition, measured by the number of local stations, as a control variable while examining ownership and local television news content. He found that competition was related to staff size and minutes of local news.

Lacy, et al. (1989) also studied the effect of competition on news budgets by taking into account levels of intensity of competition between stations. Results indicated that as competition intensified for local newscasts, newsroom budgets increased. They labeled this relationship between competition and budget "financial commitment," which is the amount of money spent on the news-editorial department (Also See Litman and Bridges, 1986).

The current study utilizes the station-to-station competition measure to examine competition, conduct, and performance variables of local television news markets. It extends the work of Busterna (1980 and 1988a) and Lacy et al. (1989) by examining performance variables, as well as competition and conduct variables.

Based on industrial organizational model the following hypotheses were tested:

H1: As competition intensity increases, hours of news per day increases.

H2: As competition intensity increases, newsroom staff size increases.

H3: As the number of hours of news per day increases, the station's newscast ratings will increase.

H4: As newsroom staff size increases, the station's newscasts ratings will increase.

Method

To address the above hypotheses, a population was studied that was composed of television news departments of network affiliates in Midwest markets with at least three stations. The Midwest region population included 27 stations in markets that ranked in the top 25 Areas of Dominant Influence (ADI) in the United States. Sixty-six stations from smaller markets were also included. A stratified random sample of 43 stations was drawn from the total population of 93 stations. Stratification ensured that both major markets and smaller markets were equally represented. Twenty-one major market stations and 22 smaller market stations were included.

Full-time news employees at these stations were surveyed through the mail. They were asked questions about staff size as part of a larger questionnaire. Since more than one person responded from each station, some variation in responses to the questions was found. Therefore, the mean staff size from the respondents at each station was used.

Additional information was obtained from existing data. The hours of local news and ratings for the local newscasts were determined from the Nielsen Station Index from the November 1989 period preceding the mail survey. The Area of Dominant Influence (ADI) rankings, used to operationally define market size, were obtained from the 1989 Broadcast Cable Yearbook. Market size was included as a control variable. The assumption was that the larger the market, the greater the advertising expenditures and the more resources a station will have.

The intensity of competition variable was created by subtracting a station's share for the early evening newscast from the share of the leading station, if the subject station was not leading the market. If the station had the largest share in the market, its closest competitor's share was subtracted from its share. The absolute value was used, resulting in a scale from zero to 100, with zero representing intense competition and 100 representing no competition.

Because zero signifies the most intense competition, this scale would have a negative sign for a positive relationship. That is, when intensity results in increased financial commitment, the beta weight would have a negative sign. To avoid confusion, the competition scale was multiplied by negative one. This did not affect the size of the beta weights, but it reversed the signs to avoid confusion over the direction of the relationship.

Path analysis was used to test the hypotheses and the applicability of the industrial organization model to local television news markets. Nonrecursive ordinary least squares regressions were conducted. The final models were constructed by retaining or deleting causal paths on the basis of statistical significance of the beta weights. Significant betas ($p<.05$) with appropriate signs were considered to demonstrate support for hypothesized relationships.

The data were checked for violations of assumptions of regression analysis. In the final statistical analysis, four stations were dropped. One was dropped because of incomplete data. Three Chicago market stations were dropped because the data for these stations overwhelmed the data from the other stations when regression analysis was performed. For example, the variable of staff size was in some cases three times as large as some other large market stations. These outliers would need separate testing or evaluation because regression analysis does not handle such data well. As such, 39 stations were left for the path analysis.

All variables except for competition intensity had skewness values under one, which was acceptable. For the variable of competition intensity, one case exceeded three standard deviations from the mean; therefore, it was assigned the value of plus three standard deviations from the mean.

The standardized residuals for the regression equations were plotted against the standardized predicted values to check for non-linear relationships. No non-linear patterns were observed.

Results

The first two hypotheses explore the relationship between competition intensity and conduct variables. The results of the path analyses are shown in Figures 1. Hypothesis one stated that as competition intensity increases, hours of news per day increases. Competition intensity was positively related with the number of local news hours per day, which supports the hypothesis.

The sample equation in Figure 1 had an adjusted r-square of .38. The standardized beta weight for the relationship between competition intensity and hours of news was .25, and competition intensity was uniquely associated with about 6 percent of the total variance in hours of local television news.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis two stated that as competition intensity increases, newsroom staff size increases. No significant relationship was found between these structure and conduct variables.

Hypotheses three and four concerned the relationship between conduct variables and the performance variables. Hypothesis three stated that the ratings of the local early evening news market would increase as hours of local television news increased. This hypothesis was supported. About 29 percent of the total variance in early evening ratings at these 39 Midwest stations was related to the four independent variables. Hours of news had a beta weight of .37, with about 7.5 percent of total variance related to hours of local news per day.

Interestingly, the independent variable that accounted for the most variance was intensity of competition, which had a beta of .46 and was associated uniquely with about 19 percent of the variance in local evening news rating. This suggested that intense competition increased the overall ratings in the local television news market.

Hypothesis four stated ratings would increase as the newsroom staff size increased. The hypotheses was not supported by the sample. The result indicates that other conduct variables may more directly relate to news program ratings.

Finally, as with previous studies, the size of market was related to all of the conduct variables. The standardized beta weight for the relationship between ranking of market and hours of local news per day was -.58. The standardized beta weight for the relationship between ranking of market and staff size was -.70. The negative sign was expected because larger market were indicated by smaller numbers. Overall, these findings indicated a strong association.

Discussion

This current study attempted to assess the relationship between economic variables and the performance of local television news departments. It was the first study of its type to establish a link between conduct and performance in local television news. These results provide strong support for using the industrial organization model for future examination of performance of local television news departments.

Interesting relationships were found among structure, conduct and performance variables. First, the study indicated structure variables had an effect on conduct variables. For example, competition intensity was related to hours of local news per day. This suggests that when news programs are running neck-and-neck with their competitors in shares, they are more likely to differentiate their product by adding more news time per day, in order to effectively compete. This may partially account for the increase in twenty-four hour cable news operations in recent years.

Staff size, however, was not found to be directly affected by competition. This finding indicates that increasing hours of news may initially be seen as a less expensive means of competition than adding staff members. This structure/conduct relationship also provided support for applying the "financial commitment" approach to local television news competition. Again, as intensity of competition increased, resources allocated to the local television newsroom increased. The important form of conduct this takes appears to be in the increase in hours of local news per day. These findings also support Bernstein's suggestions that stations do not increase staff size to fill increased time in local news.

This management strategy of increased hours of news appears to work to some degree. In the sample, the increase in number of hours was related to 7.5 percent of the variance in ratings, Although this percentage may not seem high, it does not include the indirect impact of intensity of competition on ratings. With this effect taken into consideration, it appears competition intensity may play an important role in ratings.

Relationships were also found between market structure and performance, which suggests that the environment, as well as organizational conduct, plays a role in performance. The relationship between intensity of competition and early evening ratings implies that intense competition in local television news markets results in increased viewership for everyone. This is consistent with newspaper research and theory (Niebauer 1987; and Lacy 1989) that suggest having more options might generate greater aggregate demand.

While the study yielded significant results, some of the limitations included that the industrial organization model used here is underspecified. Market structure variables that might be fruitful for future research include the impact of regulation and role of television non-news competition. Conduct variables worth investigating include budgeting behavior, decision-making over newscast content, and the recent practice of airing news programs on competing stations. Obvious performance variables would include profits and news quality.

Despite the study's limitations, the findings are consistent with earlier studies that found a relationship between competition and staff size, budget, and time given to news (Busterna, 1980 and 1988; Lacy, et al., 1989). This study also establishes the link between hours of local news per day and ratings and suggests need for further research of the relationship between conduct and performance variables.

As the number of stations in markets increase and the video and cable markets expand, application of the industrial organization model will be useful in answering future questions regarding the effect of competition on local television news. In the Summer of 1983, Researcher Paul Hagner wrote that "because the news gathering process has an aura of an altruistic, truth-seeking operation, we sometimes forget the important fact that the news-gathering operation is a business." Unfortunately, in this age of tightened economies and increased competition, that message is never far from the minds of most journalists. In some instances, it is no longer feasible for broadcast news to compete in its current form. The key now is to examine in more depth the exact effect competition will have on broadcast journalism in years to come.

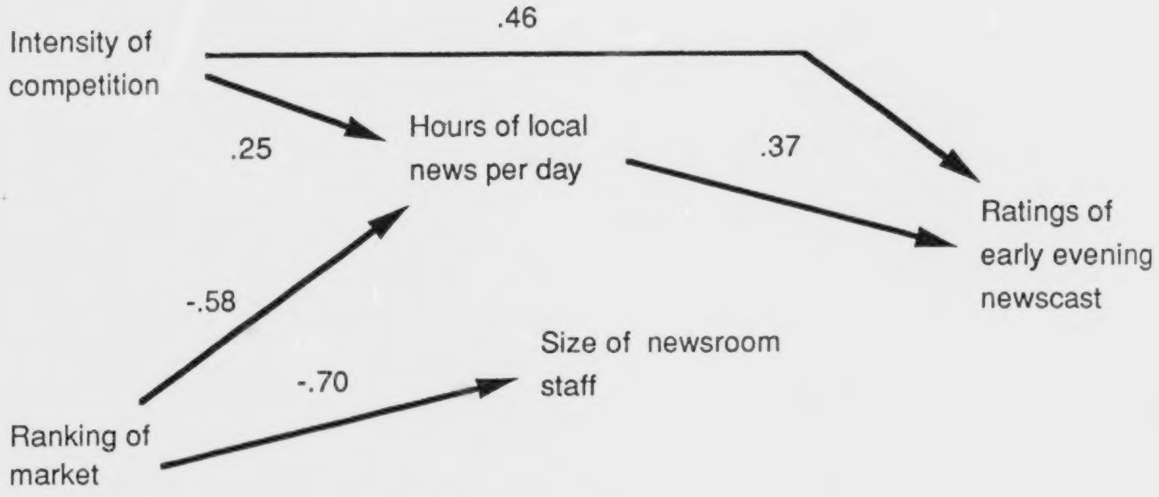

Figure 1. Path Analysis of Industrial Organization Variables for Local Television News

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The relationship between censorship and the emotional and critical tone of television news coverage of the Persian Gulf War[1]

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The relationship between censorship and the emotional and critical tone in television news coverage of the Persian Gulf War

Abstract

The Persian Gulf War provided a unique opportunity to examine the relationship between censorship and the tone and criticality of television news. Coverage of the war was unique, not because censorship was taking place, but because news stories were clearly labeled by disclaimers when they were aired.

A total of 424 television news story broadcast during the Persian Gulf War were content analyzed for the presence or absence of censorship disclaimers, the censoring source, and the producing network. The stories also were rated for emotional valence and intensity, and criticality of the story toward the source.

Results are discussed in terms of story, network, and censoring source characteristics. It was found that more negative stories tended to be more critical of the source, while more intense stories tended to be longer. Generally, stories with censorship disclaimers were more negative, more intense, and more critical than those without them regardless of network. CNN coverage did stand out as more positive, less intense and somewhat less critical than other networks. Stories with Iraqi sources were more negative, more intense, and more critical than stories with U.S. sources, regardless of the presence or absence of censorship disclaimers. However, stories with Iraqi sources tended to be more critical when they contained censorship disclaimers, while just the opposite was true for stories with U.S. sources.

The results are discussed in terms of both production- and viewer-based differences. The question of whether censorship "works" is considered in terms of unanticipated results related to story negativity, intensity, and critical treatment of the sources.

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Introduction

Government censorship in time of war is not particularly new, and coverage of the 1991 Persian Gulf War was not novel in that regard. What was unique about television news coverage of that war was the fact that censored material was clearly identified. Viewers became accustomed to hearing announcers warn of government censorship and seeing the words "Cleared by Censors" appearing along the bottom of their screens.

To be sure, the U.S. government has systematically regulated press coverage in time of war since World War II.[1] Even in Vietnam, known for its lack of official control over the press, networks practiced self censorship, "sanitizing" images of violence and death.[2] There also are examples of other governments that have employed strict controls over the press in time of strife, such as South Africa and Israel.[3]

But despite the widespread practice of censorship in time of war, never before has the television viewer been alerted so systematically that specific stories had been cleared by government or military sources. While a great deal has been written about the censorship itself, little attention has been paid to this practice. A review of the discussion of censorship appearing in newspapers, trade journals, and journalism reviews found that no attention was given to how the networks actually applied the censorship disclaimers to their reports.[4]

Message Content and the Locus of Interest: Production-based and Viewer-based Perspectives

Frequently the categories selected to analyze media content reflect interest in some aspect of the production process, such as the application of rules governing journalists' access to battle zones. Such studies tend to focus on policy concerns, and examine how variance in the production process in some way affects the corpus of media messages. These studies generally reflect sociological theories, and employ aggregated units of analysis, such as government or media institutions. However, media content can also be conceptualized in terms of how the viewer processes the message. This psychological explanation of message content takes on the individual as the unit of analysis.

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A useful way to depict this distinction is to think in terms of the television screen as a boundary layer. On one hand, media organizations deliver up to that layer a set of media messages, without being able to "see" what each individual viewer does with them. On the other hand, a viewer receives and processes messages, without being able to "see" what went on behind the screen leading up to their creation. It becomes problematic for the researcher to attempt to simultaneously conceptualize both processes without convoluting levels of analysis and committing the ecological fallacy.[5]

However, the practice of labeling news as censored, utilized during the Persian Gulf War, affords a rare opportunity to study message content in terms of the message receiver, while also taking into account the production environment. This is true in the sense that messages with disclaimers imbedded in them gave the viewer information about the production process not usually available. This study will not investigate the actual news gathering environment that led up the inclusion of the disclaimers. It will examine if message features that have been shown to affect viewer processing, such as hedonic valence, intensity, and story criticality, were limited, muted, or restricted when censorship disclaimers were present. Further, possible differences in the stories according to the networks broadcasting them, and the governments censoring them, will be examined.

News story tone

The practice of censorship is generally associated with the details of a war's conduct. Examples include control over disclosure of casualty figures or the strategic location of forces. This frequently takes the form of deletion or modification of the text of a reporter's dispatch. However, television's primary vehicle for information is the picture, not text, and addresses itself to the viewer's nonlinguistic mental systems.[6] As such, television images are rich in emotion-laden, nonverbal information. The task for the censor, then, becomes not just to control the verbal information, as is the case in print media, but to control the affective tone of nonverbal information as well.

Television news stories, like any nonverbal

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symbolic message system, contain a tone, or affective component.[7] This affective component can be conceptualized in terms of two dimensions, valence and intensity.[8] A further dimension on which news stories can be categorized is how critical they are of the censoring information source. The degree to which news is critical of its sources is important to this discussion because it is frequently used as an indicator of press independence.[9]

Emotional Valence: Valence assessment is the first and most primitive cognitive process that takes place when something new or novel appears in the environment.[10] To the degree that a threat demands action for survival, objects assessed as negative especially compel attention.[11] Negative images, such as pain and human suffering associated with war, have been shown to be more memorable than other images in television news.[12]

Implicit in the very notion of censorship is the idea that the information source is in some way trying to control, limit, or mute news content. In terms of affective tone, it would be expected that the successfully censored story would be less negative than an uncensored story. Indeed, it was the author's own experience as a correspondent in Central America, during a period of intense strife during the 1980's, that military and government leaders placed an enormous amount of emphasis on the propagation of positive news. They frequently criticized foreign press coverage as overly negative, depicting only the bad aspects of their countries.

Emotional Intensity: The second important dimension of emotion is intensity.[13] Zillmann has shown that autonomic arousal is associated with television image intensity.[14] He conceptualized intensity as a dimension of emotion separate from hedonic valence. Further, images that are both negative and intense, such as pictures of combat wounded and dead, are especially compelling. Increased information intensity is associated with increases in both recognition and frequency assessment.[15] Therefore, if the intent of censors is to minimize the affective component of war news, censored stories would be expected to be less intense than uncensored stories.

The single most negative and intense images witnessed in preparation for this study were pictures

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of the so-called "highway of death," where Iraqi soldiers were trapped under murderous repeated bombing and strafing attacks as they fled Kuwait city. Those images included pictures of charred human skeletons still posed behind the steering wheels of the vehicles they drove. One U.S. Air Force public information officer commented privately to the author that the airing of those images played a part in President Bush's decision to terminate combat two to three days prior to the date recommended by his field commanders.

Criticality of Censoring Governments: The canons of American journalism suggest that governments are not to be trusted, and official attempts to restrict the free flow of information are the bane of a free press.[16] This adversarial depiction of the press suggests an actively critical role for journalists that should be reflected in the content of their news. In time of war this presents a dilemma; on one hand the journalist feels a professional responsibility to communicate the truth regardless of its effect on the source, but on the other hand, as a citizen it is difficult for the journalist to abandon responsibility to the homeland.

The tension between allegiance to homeland and professional responsibility suggests two scenarios, one where journalists work behind enemy lines, and the other where they work among the ranks of their countrymen:

In the first case, the task of the enemy government is to control and distort information, and censorship would be one obvious mechanism toward that end. Throughout much of the Persian Gulf War the foreign press was allowed to report from Iraq, and a frequent criticism of their coverage was that due to tight controls journalists were being used as propaganda tools.

In the second case, journalists especially have to face the pressure of the conflict between professional and patriotic duty during an unpopular or mismanaged war, as was the case in Vietnam.[17] But public opinion rallied around the U.S. efforts to drive the Iraqi army out of Kuwait, after what was perceived to be Saddam Hussein's unprovoked aggression. In this arena, the press was criticized for too much flag waving, buying into government restrictions too readily.

These two scenarios yield the "bad guy" hypothesis, where it would be expected that Iraq would censor to manipulate and distort, and the "good guy" hypothesis, where the United States and its allies would censor to minimize security risks. If true, it would be anticipated that censorship effects from Iraq would be stronger than from allied sources.

Network Differences If news programming is as homogeneous among networks as many media critics contend,[18] failing to reject the null hypothesis of no difference in their coverage of the war might be predicted. Other critical theorists charge uniformity of media content is the result of institutional hegemony.[19] True, differentiation between the three major commercial networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, might be difficult, but for other networks differences might be imagined. For instance CNN emerged as a leader in television news with its blanket coverage of the war, especially from Baghdad. Also, the McNeil/Lehrer Newshour aired on PBS had access to British sources, such as International Television News, not available to all other networks.

Predictions

The preceding discussion of emotional valence and intensity, story criticality, and network sources leads to the following hypothesis about television news coverage of the Persian Gulf War:

H1: It would be in the interest of censors to limit the negativity of images in stories about the war. To the degree that they were successful stories bearing censorship disclaimers would be less negative than those that did not.

H2: Further, stories bearing censorship disclaimers would be less intense than those that did not.

H3: If censorship were used as a tool to blunt the edge of the traditional adversarial role of journalists, stories with disclaimers would be less critical than those with no disclaimers.

H4: Given the idea that there are no major differences in the manner major U.S. networks present the news, no differences would be expected.

H5: To the degree Iraq would be censoring to distort information, while U.S. sources would be censoring for tactical military reasons, the effects of censorship would be greater for stories coming from Iraqi-based sources.

Method

A content analysis was conducted of television news coverage of the Persian Gulf War from Jan. 31, 1990, to March 3, 1991. The unit of analysis for the study was story topic. A story topic consisted of sounds and pictures dealing with one event. For example, if a segment dealt with bombing of Iraq, then missile attacks on Israel, and followed by war preparations in Saudi Arabia, it was coded as three different units despite the fact the report might have been coordinated by one commentator. A total of 424 stories emphasizing breaking news, especially those showing combat and its effects, were taped at the time of broadcast. Only stories originating in the Persian Gulf were taped. The cable system from which the stories were taped drew outlets from three metropolitan areas, allowing for all nightly news shows to be pre-screened and logged for later taping when programs were rebroadcast.

Coding: Each of 12 graduate students enrolled in a research methods seminar viewed and coded a two hour video tape. Prior to actual coding, a training session was conducted in which the coding instrument was explained. Three practice stories were coded, and the results discussed in a round table setting to ensure that all coders understood and agreed upon the coding procedure and the meaning of the categories. One item on three stories was rated by all coders, and showed intercoder reliability of 87 percent.

Determining the length of the disclaimers and the story topics was accomplished by reading longitudinal time code that had been inserted in a window on the video tape. The channel on which disclaimers occurred was coded and included audio, video, or both. Disclaimer position, including beginning, middle, or end of the story, also were coded. Network was coded to include ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, or PBS. For this study, censoring country was coded as U.S., Iraq, or other. The stories also were rated for emotional valence,[20] intensity,[21] and how critical the story was of the main source.[22] The main source was defined as the government identified in censorship disclaimers, or in the case where no disclaimers were present, the government that would have been identified as the censor.

Results

Results are discussed in terms of how the stories differed in affective tone and criticality generally, how they differed according to the network that aired them, and how they differed according to the censoring source.

Story Character

Stories were categorized according to the primary government or military source of information for the central topic. That is, a story reported from a U.S. Army or allied unit would have been coded as a U.S. sourced story, even though it might have been operating inside Iraqi territory. Using that scheme, 228 stories are from U.S sources, and 101 stories are from Iraqi sources. The remaining 95 stories had other sources, such as Israeli coverage of Scud missile attacks.

A total of 102 stories, or 31 percent, contained censorship disclaimers. Of those, 10 percent were audio disclaimers, 73 percent were visual disclaimers, and 17 percent had both audio and visual disclaimers. The average disclaimer lasted 3 seconds.

Among the variables measuring story tone, two sets of relationships stand out. First, increases in story negativity corresponds to increases in how critical the story was of the source (r=.38, p<.001). Second, longer stories are more intense (r=.26, p<.001). Principal components factor analysis of story valence, intensity, criticality, and length generated a two factor solution that support those relationships. Table 1 shows the first factor accounts for 37.8 total variance and loads on story valence and story criticality, while the second factor accounts for 29.4 percent of total variance and loads on intensity and length.

Place Table 1 about here

Story Valence: Analysis of variance shows that stories with disclaimers are more negative (M=4.40) than stories without disclaimers (M=3.60), F=3.39, df=314,4,1, p<.06. Further, stories aired by ABC were more negative (M=4.58) than NBC (M=4.35), PBS (M=4.27), CBS (M=4.09), or CNN (M=3.65), F=3.22, df=314,4,1, p<.01. The censorship by network interaction was not statistically significant. These results go counter to both Hypothesis 1, that predicted censored stories would be less negative, and Hypothesis 4, that predicted there would be no network differences. Results are depicted in Figure 1.

Place Figure 1 about here

Story Intensity: Analysis of variance reveals an interaction between the presence or absence of censorship disclaimers and network source for story intensity, F=3.44, df=314,4,1, p<.009. Figure 2 shows that stories with disclaimers were more intense (M=4.41) than stories without disclaimers (M=4.10). Further, stories aired by CBS were more intense (M=4.54) than NBC (M=4.49), ABC (M=4.17), PBS (M=4.09), or CNN (M=4.05). These results again run counter to Hypothesis 2, that predicted censored stories would be less intense, and Hypothesis 4, that predicted there would be no network differences.

Place Figure 2 about here

Story Criticality: Figure 3 shows that stories with disclaimers were more critical of the source (M=3.85) than stories without disclaimers (M=3.11), regardless of network F=12.79, df=314,4,1, p<.001. No statistically significant differences were detected between criticality and the network airing the story. These results also run counter to Hypothesis 3, that predicted censored stories would be less critical of originating sources, but supports Hypothesis 4, that predicted there would be no differences between networks.

Place Figure 3 about here

Censoring Government Differences

The perception among many journalists covering the war was that both Iraqi and U.S. sources exercised very tight control over information.[23] Therefore, it is not surprising to see 58.8 percent of news coming from Iraq carried censorship disclaimers. But given journalists' complaints about tight controls imposed by U.S. officials, it is somewhat surprising to see only 18.5 percent of stories from U.S. sources carried censorship disclaimers, Chi square (1, N=329) = 53.4, $p<.001$.

Overall, stories with Iraqi sources were more negative, more intense, and more critical than stories with U.S. sources, regardless of the presence or absence of censorship disclaimers. Analysis of variance shows that stories coming from Iraq sources were more negative (M= 3.70) than stories from U.S. sources (M=3.47) F=22.53, df=324,1,1, p<.001. Stories coming from U.S. sources also were less intense (M=4.14) than those from Iraq sources (M=4.47), F= 5.63, df=324,1,1, p<.01. Finally, Figure 4 shows an interaction between story source and the presence or absence of censorship disclaimers for story criticality, F=4.63, df=324,1,1, p<.03. Stories based on Iraqi sources with disclaimers were more critical (M=4.36) than Iraqi stories without them (M=3.93). However, stories based on U.S. sources with disclaimers were less critical (M=2.69) than U.S. stories without disclaimers (M=2.98). This result tends to go against Hypothesis 5, that predicted the effects of censorship would be greater for stories based on Iraqi sources.

Place Figure 4 about here

Networks and Censoring Governments

Table 2 shows that for stories based on U.S. sources, CNN used censorship disclaimers the most (37.0 percent of the time), followed by CBS, (15.2 percent of the time), PBS (14.6 percent of the time), ABC (10.0 percent of the time), and NBC (2.0 percent of the time), Chi square (4,N=101) = 26.9, p<.001. For stories coming from Iraqi sources, CBS used censorship disclaimers the most (86.7 percent of the time), followed by CNN, (73.5 percent of the time), NBC (62.5 percent of the time), ABC (36.4 percent of the time), and PBS (32.0 percent of the time) Chi square (4, N=224) = 17.7, p<.001.

Place Table 2 about here

Finally, Figure 5 shows that all stories were generally less critical when they were based on U.S. sources than with Iraqi-based sources, regardless of network, F=5.22 df=315,4,1, p<.001. This tends to confirm the flag-waving hypothesis, that U.S.-based stories would be less critical than Iraqi-based stories.

Place Table 5 about here

Discussion and Conclusion

While the actual ground rules of censorship during the Persian Gulf War laid down by the United States and Iraq may not have differed much from previous wars fought during this century, the broadcast of news the war generated did. For the first time television viewers were routinely forewarned that some of the material they were seeing was cleared by censors.

Despite the novelty of this practice, there has been virtually no discussion by professionals or academics about the actual application of the disclaimers. One conclusion that can be reached from this lack of discussion is that there was nothing to say. That is, the networks had no clear systematic policy concerning the use of disclaimers, and applied them on an ad hoc basis. Indeed, this study generated little statistical support for any systematic scheme in the way disclaimers were actually placed in news stories.[24] If this is true, then differences in the news that can be accounted for by the presence or absence of the disclaimers are all the more interesting.

Production Based Differences: One way to analyze media content is to construct categories in terms of elements in the message production process. Three such categories for this study were the presence or absence of censorship disclaimers, the producing network, and the main source used in the story.

First, stories that contained disclaimers tended to be more negative, more intense, and more critical than stories that did not, regardless of producing network. On the surface, this seems to go against a set of hypothesis that predicted successful censorship would be reflecting in muting emotional tone.

Neither was the prediction of no differences between networks altogether supported. CNN stood out in particular, airing stories that contained more disclaimers, were more positive, less intense, and less critical of sources than the other networks.

The idea that the United States tended to receive more positive, less intense, less critical coverage than Iraq was supported for all five networks.

Viewer Based Differences: Some of the differences encountered in this study, such as the fact longer stories tended to be more intense, did not have an obvious production-based explanation. One viewer-based explanation has to do with the processing of emotionally charged information as a primitive adaptive process. This process is seated deep in the currents of the evolutionary necessity to survive. From this perspective, valence assessment is automatic and rapid, while intensity judgment is cumulative.

It has been shown that people respond to emotionally charged television images in the same way they do to real images. That means that a story with negative material would receive a valence assessment even if it appeared on the screen briefly, while an intense story would depend on the length of time the images persisted on the screen.

The discussion about the practical implications of the disclaimers also can be summed up in terms of viewer-based considerations. The viewer-based question is: Are stories with disclaimers less emotionally charged and less critical, as censors might hope? The answer to this question is problematic and bears directly on the technical issue of whether or not nonverbal information can be controlled in the same way verbal information can. It turns out that stories with censorship disclaimers tended to be negative, intense, and critical. If the intent of the censors was to mute these effects, then they failed. However, if images of the tragedy of war simply evoke what fundamentally amounts to the most primitive of all emotions, fear, then the visual component of television may be so robust, that the censors never had a chance.

Endnotes

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4. See Glen Frankel, "Journalists Tell How Iraqis Censored Their Reports," Washington Post, A-13, (Feb. 9, 1991); "Journalists in War of Strict Press Rules," Broadcasting, 22-23, (Jan. 28, 1991); and Schanberg, op. cit.

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13. Lang op. cit.

14. Dolf Zillmann, "Television Viewing and Arousal," In D. Pearl, L. Bouthilet, & J. Lazar, (Eds.), Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implication of the Eighties, 53-67, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982).

15. Douglas Hintzman. "Schema abstraction in a multiple-trace memory model." Psychological Review, 93, 4: 411-427. (1986).

16. Siebert, op. cit.

17. Oscar Patterson III, "Television's Living Room War in Print: Vietnam in the News Magazines," Journalism Quarterly, 61, 1, 35-39, 134, (Spring, 1984).

18. See George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, & Nancy Signorielli, "Living with Television: The Dynamics of the Cultivation Process," In Jennings Bryant, & Dolf Zillmann, (Eds.), Perspectives on Media Effects, 17-40, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1985); and Joshua Meyrowitz, No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

19. See Jorgen Habermas. Communication and the evolution of society. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971).

20. Valence was rated on a 7-point scale, where 1 = very positive, and 7 = very negative. Coders were shown example stories during training. They were instructed to code stories explicitly depicting episodes of human suffering and death, such as the actual images of burned bodies, as very negative. Stories depicting episodes of human happiness and well being, such as soldiers playing volleyball during a break in the desert, were coded as very positive.

21. Intensity was rated on a 7-point scale, where 1 = not intense at all, and 7 = very intense. Coders were instructed to rate extremely explicit or graphic images, such as full screen closeups of flies landing on a burned human skull, as very intense. A long shot of a stream of prisoner in the distance was to be coded as not intense at all. Examples of varying degrees of intensity in hedonically positive stories also were shown and explained.

22. Criticality was rated on a 7-point scale, where 1 = not critical at all, and 7 = very critical. Coders were instructed to rate a story where the correspondent explicitly questioned claims made by the censoring source as very critical. Stories where such claims went unquestioned were to be rated as not critical at all.

23. See Sherer, op. cit.

24. Differences between audio and video disclaimers, disclaimer length and location were examined, and were considered in terms of variables measuring emotional tone, criticality, network, and story source. However, none of those relationships revealed any clear statistically significant trends.

Table 1
Story Tone and Length

Variable	Factor Loading[1] First	 Second
Story Length	-----	.83
Story Valence	.84	-----
Story Intensity	-----	.74
Critical of the Source	.79	-----
Percent Variance Explained	37.8	29.4
Eigenvalue	1.51	1.17

---

[1] Factor loadings above .30 are reported

Table 2

Percent of Persian Gulf News Stories Containing Censorship Disclaimers By Network

Network	U.S. Sources[1]	Iraqi Sources[2]
ABC	10.0	36.4
NBC	2.0	62.5
CBS	15.2	86.7
CNN	37.0	73.5
PBS	14.6	32.0

---

[1] Chi Square (4, N=101) = 26.9, $p<.001$

[2] Chi Square (4, N=224) = 17.7, $p<.001$

Figure 1
Story Valence by Censorship Disclaimer
and Network

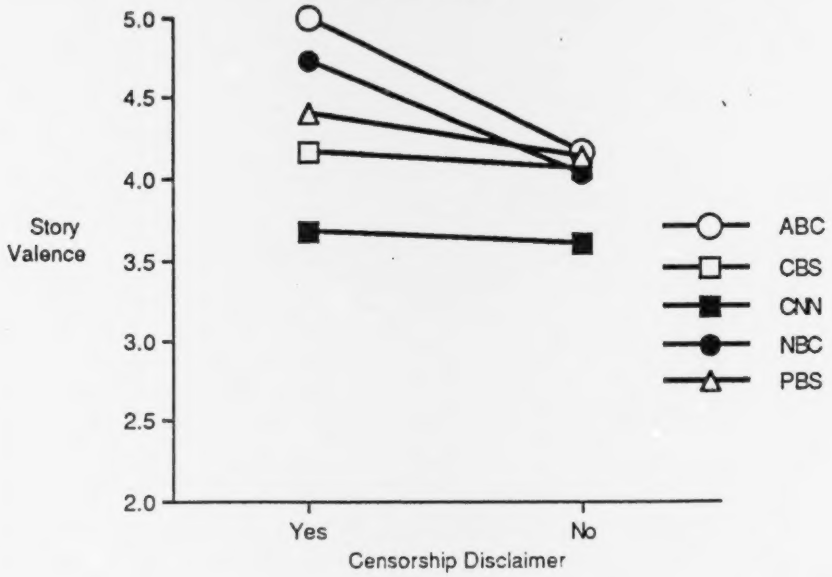


Figure 2
Story Intensity by Censorship Disclaimer
and Network

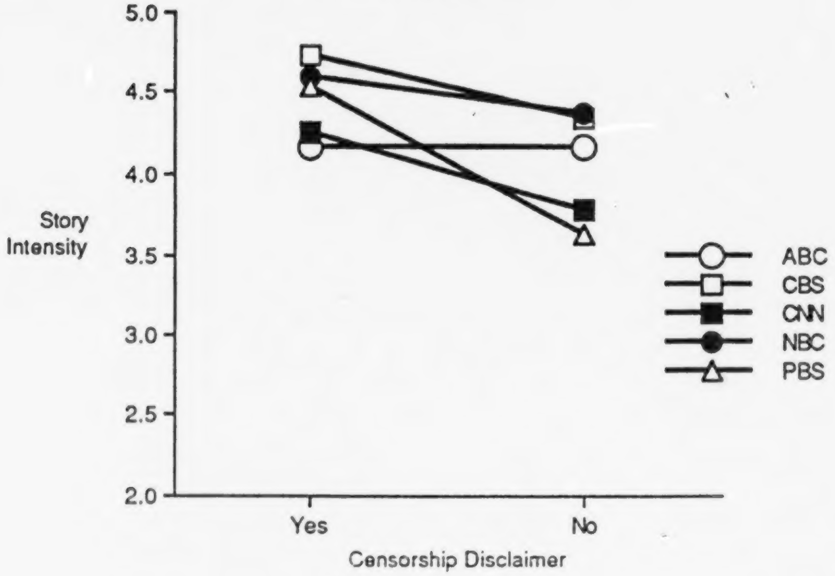


Figure 5
Television News Story Criticality of Censoring Source by Network

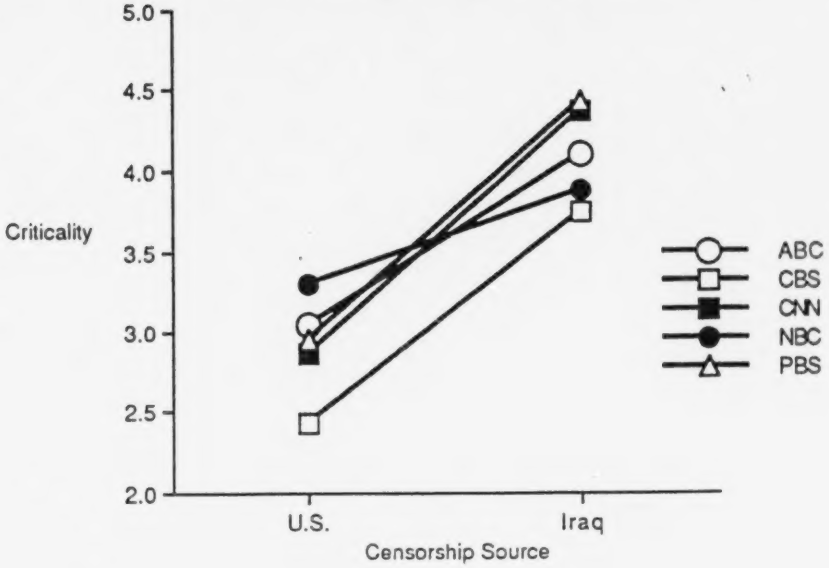


Figure 3
Story Criticality by
Censorship Disclaimer

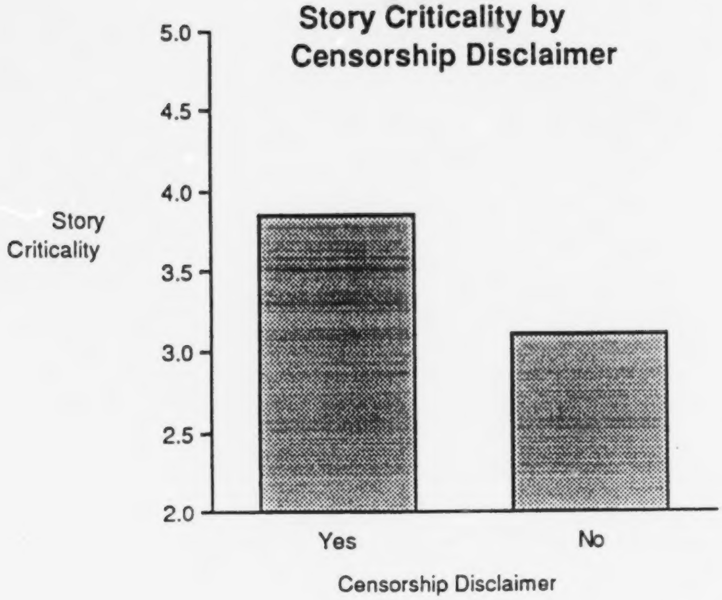
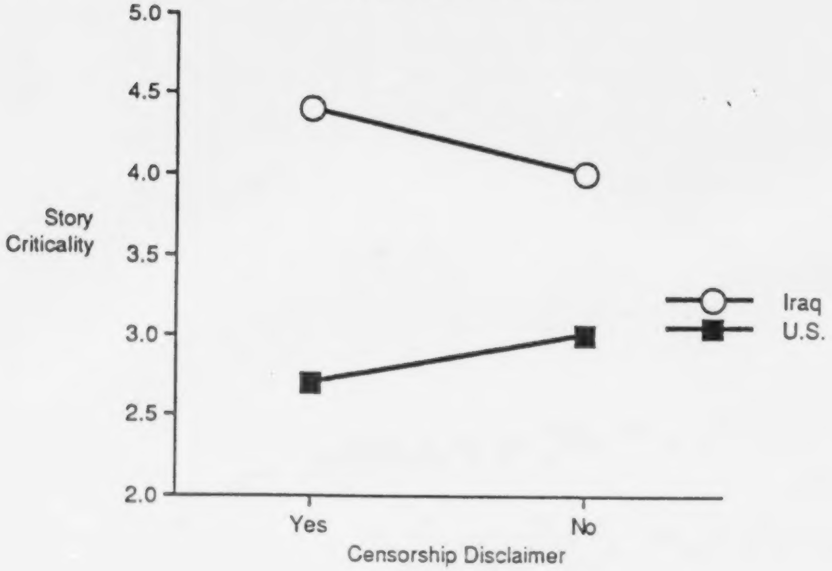


Figure 4
Story Criticality by Censorship Source and Censorship Disclaimer



The Dynamics of Television Program Audience Accumulation

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*The authors are grateful to ABC for providing the data analyzed here. The views expressed here do not necessarily represent those of Capital Cities/ABC, Inc.

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Miami, May, 1992.

Questions about how people watch television have been asked by industry and academic researchers for decades. The research literature identifies two schools of thought that relate to viewing behavior. Basically they revolve around assumptions of audience activity. The uses and gratifications perspective depicts the audience as actively involved in television program selection, while the audience flow perspective considers viewers to be passive and sees television structural elements as primary forces that dictate audience size. Consequently audience flow adherents ask questions about program lead-in effects, and uses and gratifications researchers investigate individuals' purposive viewing choices.

While some of the research in each of these traditions at times seems to ignore that of the other, Blumler (1979) and Webster & Wakshlag (1983) correctly indicate that audience activity is not an either or proposition. Both structural elements and viewer choice have an affect on television audience sizes. Unfortunately, we have little information about the relative importance of theses two opposing perspectives of the audience.

In attempting to integrate these often disparate perspectives on audience behavior, Hawkins, Reynolds, and Pingree (1991) emphasize the importance of studying viewing behaviors themselves. One of the fundamental questions about audience behavior involves the extent to which TV viewers continually come back to watch the same programs week after week. A handful of scholars have attempted to answer questions of this type by investigating patterns of repeat viewing.

Repeat viewing has been defined as "the extent of audience overlap between different episodes of regular programs (Goodhart, Ehrenberg, & Collins, 1987)". As a construct it has been operationalized at least five different ways and measured in two countries using at least 6 different methods. The trend over time from these data seems to indicate that repeat viewing levels, though never very high, are declining. This has been interpreted as support for the view that television watching involves little active decision making.

In the United Kingdom, published studies on repeat viewing began in 1975. Early British research efforts operationalized repeat viewing as the percentage of the audience for half of one program broadcast on one night of the week that also watched the second half of the program seen the following evening. A second operationalization involved looking at the audience for evening programs from one week and calculating the percentage that viewed the same program again the next week. A third procedure looked at the extent to which daytime program viewers on friday, also watched the same program on each of the other days that week. The fourth way that repeat viewing was operationalized involved the percentage of the first weeks audience for a program that also watched that program the second week , the third week and the fourth week. This process was later carried out further in time by calculating the percentage of the first week's audience that also watched the same program as many as ten weeks later.

These researchers utilized national and local ratings data to test repeat viewing and reported remarkably consistent findings of 50 to 55 percent. This means that, on average, about half of the audience for one program was in the audience for a subsequent episode of that show. However, the further away each episode was in time from the other one, the lower the level of repeat viewing was observed. A one percentage decline was reported for each week that separated the episodes. Levels of repeat viewing also fluctuated by rating level. Higher rated programs had higher repeat viewing levels. Program types, and demographic factors had little impact on repeat-viewing levels.

In the United States, Barwise et al (1982) argued that conventional wisdom said repeat-viewing levels of programs with steady ratings were as high as 90 percent. Published empirical research was limited to two reports because no routine data were available on the same people's viewing week-by-week. This information was however available within the television industry, but was costly and time consuming to analyze and therefore not routinely complied.

Barwise et al (1982) analyzed Arbitron data from 18,000 individual viewers in New York City (January 1974 and October 1975), Los Angeles (October 1976), and San Francisco (February 1979). They introduced a new approach by averaging repeat viewing levels across all possible pairs of weekdays in their examination of daytime viewing. They reported repeat viewing levels of 53%. For prime time viewing they analyzed responses of 300 people from Los Angeles and calculated the percentage of the audience watching during the first week of the sweeps that also watched the same program 4 weeks later. They found that repeat viewing averaged 46%.

Barwise (1986) studied homes data from the Nielsen Television Index (NTI) national meter panel, homes and people data from the Nielsen National Audience Composition (NAC) diary panel, and people data from Television Audience Assessment (TAA). Repeat-viewing of weekly prime-time series was reported to be 45 percent from the NTI meter panel, 41 % for the NAC diary panel, and 36% for the TAA study. Each of these data sets spanned different time periods. The NTI meter panel data covered four weeks. All possible combinations of weeks were averaged together in the analysis. For the NAC diary panel, the data crossed 12 weeks, with respondents filling out a diary every third week. The same averaging process for all possible weekly combinations was utilized. Finally the TAA data covered two weeks or so for adults, even less time for children and teenagers.

Ehrenberg and Wakshlag (1987) analyzed data collected from the AGB people-meter panel in Boston, Massachusetts, in May and June 1985. They reported that the people meter repeat rates from the Boston panel were on average only 24 percent. This time the data spanned eight weeks and the authors employed the same procedure of averaging all possible combinations of weeks together (that is averaging week 1 with week 2, and week 1 with week 3, and week 2 with week 3, etc.). The authors suggested that one reason for these results might be that ratings in Boston generally tend to be low, and repeat levels are usually lower for low rated programs. Barwise (1986) also argues that increased competition from other viewing sources will further lower levels of repeat viewing.

It seems that trying to describe how viewers come back to the same program over time is an important step in understanding audience behavior. However, the various operationalizations of this construct of repeat viewing seem in part to be able to explain declining levels of repeat viewing. The further away in time one episode of a program is from another, the greater it would seem is the likelihood that someone watching the first episode would not watch the second. By covering greater and greater time spans in these studies, the researchers have made it easier to show lower levels of repeat viewing than those originally obtained in England. When the time span between repeat broadcasts went from one night in a week to the following night in that same week, or from one week to the following week, it would be far more likely to observe higher levels of repeat viewing. In attempting to better describe the viewing behavior of audiences by studying longer time spans (an admirable approach), it seems that we are left with less than a clear picture of "the extent of audience overlap between different episodes of regular programs", i.e. repeat viewing.

Another approach to looking at repeat viewing is to simply look at the frequency distribution of the number of episodes of a series watched by the week in which the episode aired for the entire reach (total audience exposed to a series over the course of an entire television season). In this manner a view is provided of how television audiences view programs over time. This was the approach taken in this paper. By examining the frequency distribution of a programs reach, one can unambiguously examine the extent of audience overlap between different episodes of a television series. Differential patterns of viewing will be able to shed light on the level of audience activity. Identifying when, if anytime, during the course of a season viewers are more likely to watch programs will tell us if the audience actively selects programs. Analyzing patterns of rejecting programs during the season will also indicate something about the nature of the audience's activity level.

This study asks the question, to what extent is purposive audience behavior observable in the patterns of viewing behavior as they occur over the course of the television season?

Method

National audience ratings for the 1988-1989 television season which ran from the middle of September to the middle of April obtained by the A. C. Nielsen Co. formed the basis for the analyses of this paper. New and returning episodic television series broadcast by one of the three commercial television networks (ABC, CBS, & NBC) were the primary programs studied. Additional analyses were performed on programs that ran on FOX and in Syndication. Failed series (those that were canceled) were examined during the first eight weeks of the season. In all, 70 TV series were studied.

Sample

Nielsen's probability sample of the U.S. consists of 4,000 households and includes some 9,000 people. This is a stratified, multi-stage area sample of housing units in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii. Counties or county combinations are the first stage of selection, followed by census block groups, blocks within groups, and housing units in each block. Stratification involved Nielsen territory, Nielsen county size, cable tv penetration, geographic group, Black and Spanish households, and households with children (Statistical Research, Inc., 1989).

Viewership

The ratings data obtained from this sample is quite extensive. Minute by minute data is available on a household and persons basis. The middle minute of each telecast was used as a measure of viewership for each episode of all television series. That is, ratings data for a household or person that indicated viewing was taking place during the middle minute of a program was tallied as watching the show. When that same person's or household's ratings data indicated they were watching the middle minute of a subsequent episode of the program, they would be counted as watching that show as well. This industry convention of selecting the middle minute is widely accepted among advertising and media professionals. Unpublished analyses indicate little variation between this method of identifying program viewership over time and other methods utilizing other minutes or combinations of minutes to determine viewing.

Reach

The reach of a television series refers to the unduplicated total number of households that saw at least six minutes of one episode from the series during the course of the season. It is usually expressed as a percentage of all TV households.

Frequency

The frequency of a television series is the average number of episodes that the average household in the reach of the series watched during the course of a season.

Rejection Rate

The rejection rate for a television series is the percentage of the reach that watched only one or two episodes of the series during the course of the season.

Results

Results will first be presented for new network television series, followed by returning network series, series broadcast by FOX or available in syndication, and finally failed network series. Program rejection rates will be presented last.

New Network Television Series

Those network television series that successfully lasted the season formed the basis for the first analysis. The reach, frequency, and number of telecasts for each of these eight series are displayed in Table 1.

Insert Table One About Here

Individual network scheduling decisions affected the number of times each series was broadcast, but on average, there were 21 episodes of each series presented to the public. Sixty-two percent of the television households in the country saw some portion of the average new show, and they watched an average of 5.2 episodes.

Insert Table Two About Here

Table Two reports the average new network program reach and frequency distribution for the reach by telecast week. While 27.2% of the average new show reach saw the first telecast, a little more than half (56%) of the average reach was part of the audience for the first four telecasts. Relatively little of the viewing of these programs occurred during the second half of the season. A single-sample chi-square test was performed on the frequency distribution of this reach data broken out into units of four telecasts. Results indicated that significantly more viewing during the first four episodes occurred than was expected by chance (X^2=992.189, df=4, p<.0001).

Insert Table Three About Here

Similar results are presented in Table Three for various sex and age demographic groups. Chi-square tests on the frequency data for each row of the table were significant beyond the .0001 level. These results suggest that viewing the first four episodes of a program is dependent on a conscience decision on the part of viewers.

Sampling new programs tends to differ by age. Children and teens were the least likely to sample new programs during the first four telecasts, with 40% of them exhibiting this viewing style. Young adult females, aged 18 to 34 were less likely to sample early in the season than their older counterparts (chi-square=10.409,df=2, p<.005). Similar results were found for males (chi-square=4.917,df=2, p<.086).

Returning Network Programs

The 27 returning network television programs that were analyzed in this section of the paper are listed in Table Four along with the number of telecasts broadcast for each series. The programs are categorized by the following program genres: situation comedy, drama, action/adventure, and news or reality programming.

Insert Table Four About Here

The returning network program reach and frequency data are displayed in Table Five. The greatest reach levels were obtained by the news programs where on average two-thirds of the households saw some portion of these programs. Action adventure and drama programs had the smallest reach with about half the households watching those shows. Situation comedies had reach levels close to those of news programming.

Insert Table Five About Here

Significantly more viewing occurred for the first four telecasts of the average returning network series(56%) than during the remainder of the season (chi-square=975.054,df=4, p<.0001). Similar results were found for each of the returning program genres. Compared to other program types, news shows received more sampling at the end of the season (chi-square=107.720, df=3, p<.0001). Table Six displays these data.

Insert Table Six About Here

Viewer's sampling of returning network programs exhibited the same demographic tendencies as new programs did. Table Seven reports these demographic differences. Viewing styles differed by age. Children and teens were the least likely to sample returning programs during the first four telecasts, with about 40% of them exhibiting this viewing style. Young adult females, aged 18 to 34 were less likely to sample early in the season than their older counterparts (chi-square=12.353, df=2, p<.002). Similar results were found for males (chi-square=6.197, df=2, p<.045).

Insert Table Seven About Here

FOX and Syndication Programs

The number of telecasts, reach, and frequency data for the FOX and Syndicated television programs are presented in Table Eight. These programs reached 1/3 to 1/2 fewer households than returning network shows.

Insert Table Eight About Here

A larger percentage of the average returning network program's reach (28%) watched the first telecast, compared to Fox (15%) and Syndicated programs (13%), chi-square=72.785, df=2, p<.0001. And conversely, a larger percentage of the FOX (18%) and Syndicated Program (19%) reach watched during the last weeks of the season (chi-square=65.080, df=2, p<.0001). But just like network programs, the largest percentage of the FOX (39%) and Syndicated program reach was found in the first four telecasts (chi-square=396.550, df=4, p<.0001; and chi-square=362.841, df=4, p<.0001, respectively). These data are found in Table Nine.

Insert Table Nine About Here

Failed Network Series

The names of network series introduced in the fall, or as mid-season replacements, failed series, and renewed programs are displayed in Table Ten.

Insert Table Ten About Here

The reach for the six classes of programs examined in this paper, broken out by the frequency distribution for the first eight telecasts is shown in Table Eleven.

Insert Table Eleven About Here

Separate chi-square tests for program classification revealed that significant differences in these distributions exist. All of the tests resulted in very large chi-square values (from 394 to 697) and all significant beyond the .0001 level. About one-third of all the viewing of these programs took place during the first telecast. This represents about twice the amount of viewing that was accounted for by the second telecast. On average, about ten percent of the reach for these programs watched the seventh or eighth telecast.

Rejection Rates

New Shows. The new television program rejection rates are displayed in Table Twelve.

Insert Table Twelve About Here

Considerable variability among individual program rejection rates was apparent. Rates ranged from a low of 29.9 to a high of 54.3. On average, about 42% of all households watched new programs only one or two times during the television season. These rejection rates are contrasted with frequent viewing (11 or more times in the season). High rejection rates were found to correspond with low frequent viewing levels.

Rejection rates for new shows broken out by demographics are reported in Table Thirteen.

Insert Table Thirteen About Here

Teens and children had the highest rejection rates. For both women and men, younger adults were more likely to reject new series than their older counterparts (chi-square=15.554, df=2, p<.0001 and chi-square=22.712, df=2, p<.0001). Younger adult male and females viewers were also less likely to have high frequent viewing levels (chi-square=14.000, df=2, p<.001 and chi-square=10.314, df=2, p<.006).

Returning Shows. Table Fourteen shows rejection rates for the four types of returning network programs. On average, about 43% of the viewers of returning shows watched only one or two episodes over the season. Differences among the rejection rates for the program types were not significant.

Insert Table Fourteen About Here

Returning network program rejection rates are contrasted with rejection rates for FOX and Syndication series in Table Fifteen.

Insert Table Fifteen About Here

Network series had significantly lower rejection rates and higher frequent viewing levels than FOX and Syndication programs (chi-square=40.325, df=2, p<.0001 and chi-square=100.427, df=2, p<.0001 respectively).

Demographic differences among rejection rates are displayed in Table Sixteen for returning network and Fox programs.

Insert Table Sixteen About Here

For network programs, younger males and females had higher rejection rates than older males and females (chi-square=16.895, df=2, p<.0001 and chi-square=25.725. df=2, p<.0001 respectively). For FOX's three most popular programs (chi-square=22.604, df=2, p<.0001 and chi-square=25.465, df=2, p<.065), and for the remainder of the FOX shows analyzed here (chi-square=13.113, df=2, p<.001 and chi-square=7.674, df=2, p<.022 respectively), the opposite was true. Younger adult women and men had lower rejection rates than their older counterparts..

Discussion

The results of this research clearly show that the television audience is active in program selection. This is evident by examining the results of when they view during the season. For new and returning network programs, as well a those on FOX or shows available in syndication, the results were the same. The largest bulk of a program's audience (about 56%) tunes in during the first four telecasts. This was also the case when we examined only the first eight weeks of a program's life. In these analyses, failed TV series showed the same patterns. Most of the viewers made up their minds about viewing the series early in the season. These national probability sample viewing data gathered over the course of an entire television season substantiate an active audience perspective.

Examining program rejection rates results in similar conclusions about the role of activity. Significant numbers of viewers reject programs outright, after one or two showings. Again these behaviors argue for an active audience.

Demographic differences in viewing styles were discernable in this research. Children, teens, and young adults showed higher rejection rates. Older adults were more likely to watch the first four telecasts than anyone else. Perhaps this is because they traditionally spend more time watching television than other people do.

One interesting finding among program types concerned the fact that news programs had lower levels of initial viewing and higher levels of viewing later in the season than the other types. Perhaps this is do to the anthology nature of the news shows which results in more sustained viewing interests throughout the season. These programs do not run repeats and their generally is not a season premier as there is with other form of programs. These differences could account for the news viewing patterns found here.

The fact that the other network programs run repeats could in part explain the findings for FOX and syndication. Their lower levels of initial audience response may well simply reflect less interest on the part of viewers, and heightened audience involvement with anticipated network programs. When the networks run more repeats later in the season, FOX and syndication gain audience who have either lost interest in network shows or don't want to watch repeats. Therefore viewers tune into something new.

The behavioral data analyzed in this study do not address why program decisions are made or how viewers come to make them. Inferences about purposive audience behavior were drawn from the viewing patterns discerned here. Future research should derive more direct evidence by inquiring about the process of how viewers decide what to watch.

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Table 1

NEW SHOW REACH & FREQUENCY FOR THE FULL SEASON

AA RATING RANK	SHOW	# OF TELECASTS	REACH	FREQUENCY
2	Roseanne	24	72.0	7.4
9	Empty Nest	25	72.8	6.4
11	Dear John	21	63.7	5.6
17	Unsolved Mysteries	25	70.1	6.3
36	Murphy Brown	18	61.0	4.3
42	Midnight Caller	16	49.5	4.4
67	Paradise	18	48.8	3.9
77	Mission Impossible	23	58.4	3.6
	Average	**21**	**62.0**	**5.2**

Table 2

NEW SHOW FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION BY TELECAST WEEK

	REACH	FIRST TELECAST	FIRST 4 TELECASTS	TELECASTS			
				5 - 8	9 - 12	13 - 16	17+
1988-1989	62.0	27.2	56.3	19.1	10.8	7.5	6.4

Table 3

NEW SHOW FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION BY TELECAST WEEK

	TELECASTS		
	First 4 Telecasts	5 - 8	9+
Households	56.3	19.1	24.7
Total Viewers	47.1	21.6	31.2
Women			
18-34	48.7	20.2	31.1
35-49	51.5	20.4	28.1
50+	53.5	20.0	26.5
Men			
18-34	42.9	23.2	33.8
35-49	47.1	21.0	31.8
50+	50.5	22.3	27.2
Teens	41.4	23.3	35.4
Kids	41.0	23.0	36.1

Table 4

RETURNING SHOWS

SITCOMS	# T/C	DRAMAS	#T/C	ACTION	#T/C	NEWS/ REALITY	#T/C
Bill Cosby	25	Matlock	19	Hunter	23	60 Minutes	24
Golden Girls	25	L.A. Law	23	In Heat of the Night	17	20/20	25
Growing Pains	23	Murder She Wrote	23	MacGyver	19	48 Hours	21
Amen	22	Thirtysomething	17	Wiseguy	17	West 57	24
Full House	24	Knots Landing	22	Tour of Duty	13		
Designing Women	18	Dallas	21				
Newhart	17	Falcon Crest	19				
Just the Ten of Us	23	China Beach	18				
Day By Day	19	Beauty & Beast	16				

Table 5

RETURNING SHOW REACH & FREQUENCY

Sitcoms			Dramas			Action Adventure			News/Reality		
	Reach	Freq.		Reach	Freq.		Reach	Freq.		Reach	Freq.
Bill Cosby	77.2	8.7	Matlock	53.1	6.5	Hunter	66.2	6.0	60 Minutes	77.0	7.8
Golden Girls	74.5	7.7	L.A. Law	60.6	6.0	Heat/Night	54.5	5.4	20/20	70.6	5.5
Growing Pains	65.4	6.3	Murder	68.3	7.0	MacGyver	55.7	4.4	48 Hours	61.8	4.5
Amen	62.7	6.0	Thirtysomething	49.4	4.2	Wiseguy	48.1	4.2	West 57th	54.4	3.5
Full House	63.4	6.0	Knots Landing	44.7	7.7	Tour/Duty	35.0	3.2			
Designing Women	57.7	4.7	Dallas	46.2	6.9						
Newhart	59.3	4.3	Falcon Crest	37.3	6.2						
Just 10 of Us	55.7	4.8	China Beach	50.9	4.0						
Day By Day	57.7	3.7	Beauty & Beast	42.6	3.8						
Average	**63.7**	**5.8**		**50.3**	**5.8**		**51.9**	**4.6**		**66.0**	**5.3**

Table 6

WHEN DID THE SAMPLING OCCUR

		TELECASTS % OF DISTRIBUTION				
	FIRST TELECAST	FIRST 4	5 - 8	9 - 12	13 - 16	17 +
Sitcoms	27.1	56.2	18.6	10.0	7.4	7.9
Drama	32.0	57.9	18.1	10.9	8.2	4.8
Action Adventure	27.9	58.0	19.4	12.4	7.1	3.0
News/Reality	19.0	49.5	17.5	10.2	9.2	14.6
Returning Shows Average	27.7	56.1	18.4	10.8	7.9	6.8

Table 7

RETURNING SHOWS

REJECTION RATE/WHEN SAMPLING OCCURS

	VIEWED ONLY 1 - 2 TELECASTS	VIEWED DURING FIRST MONTH OF TELECAST
Households	43.3	56.1
Women		
18-34	54.2	47.4
35-49	48.1	52.1
50+	44.0	56.1
Men		
18-34	61.3	42.8
35-49	56.2	45.9
50+	48.7	51.8
Teens	64.1	40.4
Kids	66.2	39.8

Table 8

FOX & SYNDICATION REACH & FREQUENCY

FOX				SYNDICATED			
	# of Telecasts	Reach	Freq.		# of Telecasts	Reach	Freq.
Reporters (85)	27	34.2	3.0	Charles in Charge (91)	28	35.5	3.3
Beyond Tomorrow (85)	26	26.5	2.6	Twilight Zone (93)	24	35.9	2.5
21 Jump Street (89)	24	32.6	4.0	Out of this World (84)	28	33.6	2.8
America's Most Wanted (89)	22	40.2	4.4	Star Search (93)	27	42.3	3.4
Married With Children (89)	22	37.9	4.6	Star Trek (97)	19	40.9	4.2
Garry Shandling (89)	24	29.7	3.1	War of the Worlds (96)	26	40.8	3.1
Tracey Ullman (89)	23	24.6	3.0				
Duet (85)	24	23.1	2.8				
Average		31.1	3.4		25	38.2	32

Table 9

WHEN DID THE SAMPLING OCCUR

	TELECASTS					
	FIRST TELECAST	FIRST 4	5 - 8	9 - 12	13 - 16	17 +
Returning Network Shows	27.7	56.1	18.4	10.8	7.9	6.8
FOX	15.2	38.6	17.9	14.6	11.4	17.5
Syndication	12.9	35.7	20.5	13.4	11.2	19.2

Table 10

FALL INTRODUCTIONS	MID-SEASON REPLACEMENTS	FAILED SHOWS	RENEWED SHOWS
Roseanne	Anything But Love	Annie McGuire	Roseanne
Murphy Brown	Coach	dirty Dancing	Murphy Brown
Dear John	Heartbeat	Raising Miranda	Dear John
Empty Nest	Nightingales	Baby Boom	Empty Nest
Annie McGuire	Dolphin Cove	Almost Grown	Paradise
Dirty Dancing	Father Dowling	TV 101	Mission: Impossible
Raising Miranda	ABC Mystery Movie	Tattingers	Midnight Caller
Baby Boom	Fine Romance	Knightwatch	Unsolved Mysteries
Paradfise	Hawk	Murphy's Law	Anything But Love
Almost Grown	Hard Time on Planet Earth	Incredible Sunday	Coach
TV 101	Unsub	Heartbeat	Father Dowling
Tattingers		Nightingales	ABC Mystery Movie
Mission: Impossible		Dolphin Cove	
Midnight Caller		Fine Romance	
Knightwatch		Hawk	
Murphy's Law		Hard Time on Plant Earth	
Unsolved Mysteries		Unsub	
Incredible Sunday			

Table 11

WHEN DID THE SAMPLING OCCUR

	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	FOURTH	TELECASTS 5-6	TELECASTS 7-8
New Series	33.1	17.1	13.0	11.0	16.3	9.4
Returning Series	36.9	16.9	11.6	9.8	14.3	10.5
Renewed New Shows	37.4	17.6	12.2	9.9	13.7	9.2
Failed New Shows	30.2	16.8	13.6	11.8	18.1	9.5
Fall Introductions	31.6	16.3	13.0	11.0	17.0	10.8
Mid-Season Replacements	35.7	18.5	13.1	10.6	15.1	7.0

Table 12

NEW SHOW REACH & FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION

	HOUSEHOLD REACH	# OF TELECASTS VIEWED	
		1 - 2	11 +
Roseanne	72.0	29.9	29.4
Empty Nest	72.8	35.2	22.5
Dear John	63.7	38.6	18.7
Unsolved Mysteries	70.1	35.0	22.4
Murphy Brown	61.0	46.0	10.0
Midnight Caller	49.5	45.7	9.7
Paradise	48.8	54.3	9.2
Mission Impossible	58.4	52.2	5.8
Average	**62.0**	**42.1**	**16.0**

Table 13

NEW SHOW FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION

		# OF TELECASTS VIEWED	
		1 -2	11+
HOUSEHOLDS		42.1	16.0
Women	18-34	53.0	8.2
	35-49	47.2	10.0
	50+	45.5	15.6
Men	18-34	59.3	4.6
	35-49	53.6	6.5
	50+	49.2	12.0
Teens		61.5	4.1
Kids		62.9	4.5

Table 14

AVERAGE FREQUENCY BY SHOW TYPE - RETURNING SHOWS

	TELECASTS	
	1 - 2	11 +
Sitcoms	40.1	19.3
Dramas	44.1	22.1
Action/Adventure	47.3	12.8
News/Reality	43.2	16.2
Average Returning Show	**43.3**	**18.6**

Table 15

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION

	# OF TELECASTS VIEWED	
	1 -2	11+
Returning Network shows	43.3	18.6
Fox Average	61.2	7.2
Syndication	61.4	5.5

Table 16

FOX FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION

1 - 2 TELECASTS VIEWED

		Returning Network Shows	Most Wanted, 21 Jump Street Married With Children (40%)	All Other Fox (60%)
Households		43.3	52.5	66.4
Women	18-34	54.2	54.2	69.0
	35-49	48.1	56.3	74.4
	50+	44.0	67.3	75.9
Men	18-34	61.3	54.1	68.9
	35-49	56.2	60.9	74.9
	50+	48.7	66.0	75.4
Teens		64.1	51.8	73.6
Kids		66.2	57.3	77.3

Development Orientation of Domestic and International News on the CNN World Report

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Development Orientation of Domestic and International News on the CNN World Report

Abstract

If CNN World Report is an example of the ideal NIICO newscast- in which countries are free to present their own news from their own perspectives to an international audience- we may be seeing a new trend in the use of development journalism by both developed and developing countries. This study analyzed the news stories of the CNN World Report to see if there is any measurable difference between the coverage of development news in the domestic and in the international news reported by developed and developing countries. The findings of this study indicate that there is not a significant difference between the amount of development news in the domestic stories contributed by developed and developing countries. There is a significant difference in the development orientation of international stories offered. For domestic news, both blocs focused more on development stories. For international news, both blocs oriented their coverage toward non-development stories. In fact, as a proportion of their respective contributions, the developed countries gave their international news a development orientation significantly more often than did the developing countries. The two regions that did cover development news more than non-development news in their international news content were Latin America/Caribbean and Western Europe.

Development Orientation of Domestic and International News on the CNN World Report

The Statement of Problem

During the last decade, coverage of international news by Western nations, particularly the U.S. wire agencies and television networks, came under increasing criticism. Spurred by the international debate over the New International Information and Communication Order (NIICO), critics charged that news about developing countries is distorted, biased and incomplete and often "suppressed their authentic voices" (MacBride Commission, 1981). The Third World in particular argued that coverage of their countries was slanted in favor of stories which cover internal crises, armed conflict, crime and disaster, thereby giving the Western audience an inaccurate and unfair picture of life in their countries.

In response to these shortcomings, NIICO proponents have advocated the creation of non-Western news services, organizations that would consciously give a more balanced representation in news coverage. The concept of development journalism, implying the use of journalistic skills as an instrument for economic and social change and promoting national development, evolved as a response (Righter, 1978; Tatarian, 1978; Chitmutengwende, 1984; Hachten, 1987).

It is not surprising to note that- when given the chance- media institutions in the developing world have tended to offer for international consumption news that is more development-oriented. The best illustration of this can be seen on the CNN World Report, an internationally distributed newscast in which any broadcast news organization in the world may submit news from its own perspective. What is not precisely known is whether there are measurable differences, in news contributed to CNN World Report, between the coverage of development news reported by developed and by developing countries. Nor is the ratio of development news in domestic stories to international stories known.

Most previous studies on development news have not made a distinction between domestic news and international news in terms of development orientation. This study, therefore, examines the development orientation of both domestic and international news by countries that fall into the developed and developing country categories.

The Research Questions

The following research questions are addressed in terms of domestic or international news:

1) What is the difference in the portion of development news appearing on the CNN World Report originating in developed and developing countries?

2) What topics are covered as development news in developed and

developing countries as appearing on the CNN World Report newscast?

3) Which actors from developed and developing countries are covered in the CNN World Report ?

Literature Review

Kirat and Weaver (1985), in their study of foreign news coverage in the three wire agencies- AP, UPI, and Non-aligned Pool, noted that increased reliance on journalists from the developing world may have made a difference in the kind of international news seen in the West, and accounted for what appear to be changing news values on the part of Western media. Ogan (1987) found, in her examination of selected international events covered both by Third World media and by Western media, the developing world aired development news significantly more often than did the media in the developed world. Since it began in October 1987, CNN World Report has been an important outlet for development news (Kongkeo, 1988; Dilawari et al., 1991). Although, in terms of the total sample of CNN World Report, more developing countries were participating and the number of development news stories were higher, actually, a greater percentage of the development-oriented stories were originating in the more developed countries (Dilawari et al., 1991). This was contrary to expectation.

Volkmer (1991), in her content analysis of CNN World Report, also noted that the topics presented in the sample were mostly political. She noted, in fact, that CNN World Report has become a forum for exchange of political reports which are not soft but are actually hard news stories. Shah (1988) had noted that very little development news was broadcast by radio in the developing country examined. Sreberny-Mohammadi (1985) found that politics dominated international news reporting everywhere. Ugboajah (1984) also found that Nigerian media produced more political oriented news, including military matters, than economic-oriented news.

Only a few studies have examined actors in international news. Sreberny-Mohammadi (1985) found that the frequently seen actors in the US big four wires (36%) and even on local news (43.7%) tended to be government officials and politicians. Mowlana (1986) noted that international news covered elites rather than the masses. Dilawari et al. (1991), in their study of CNN World Report, also noted that the most frequently appearing actors in international news on CNN World Report were political actors, but that there were a significantly greater number of academics, scientists, and common people appearing on the CNN World Report than on the US wire agencies and the local media.

Sample

The sample included all the news stories aired on fifteen programmes of the weekly CNN World Report telecast between January, 1990 and May, 1991. The first unit of the sample was randomly selected from among the first five weekly programmes of 1990. From then on, every fifth programme was included in the sample. Thus the sample included fifteen programmes telecast on 7 January, 11 February, 18 March, 22 April, 27 May, 1 July, 5 August, 9 September, 14 October, 18 November and 23 December of 1990, and 27 January, 3 March, 7 April, and 12 May of 1991. Since the programme telecast on 18 March, 1990 was not available, 25 March, 1990 was chosen as a substitute programme. The final sample included 566 stories submitted by a total of 106 broadcast news organizations from 96 countries. All stories were separately coded and analyzed using CNN-provided programme logs along with the video taped materials.

Coding Schedule

Sreberny-Mohammadi's (1985) coding schedule as modified by Dilawari et al. (1991) was used. However, categories of information on type of news, type of country and the region to which the main actors belonged and from which development news was being contributed were added to the modified schedule.

Methodology

The coded news stories were analyzed using basic Chi-square techniques. The results were tabulated as domestic and international news, development and non-development news, main topics of stories, and main actors by types of countries (developed or developing countries), and regions.

Countries contributing news to CNN World Report were categorized by region and by level of development as defined by the 1991 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The seven regions included were Asia/Oceania, Africa (excluding Middle East), Middle East, North America, Latin America/Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Western Europe. All countries were coded according to their geographical location in a region. All contributers to CNN World Report were also assigned to a developed or developing country category. Definitions of developed and developing countries were also based on the classifications used in the 1991 Human Development Report. As such, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Israel, the countries of Western and Eastern Europe, and North America were classified as developed countries. The developing countries comprised the countries of Africa, Asia/Oceania (minus Japan, Australia, and New Zealand), Latin America/Caribbean, and Middle East (except Israel).

International news was defined as news concerning relations between two or more nations. All news topics were classified as international news when the story involved the participation of two or more nations. For coding purposes, international news was defined as 'home news abroad,' 'foreign news at home,' and 'foreign news abroad.' Domestic news was defined as news concerning the internal issues of a country. In other words, it was home news that happened within the borders of a country contributing a story to the World Report. Domestic news was coded as 'home news at home.'

Type of news was defined as development and non-development news. The definition of development news was the one used by Sreberny-Mohammadi (1985). Any story relating to primary, secondary, and tertiary needs and to matters of administrative reforms, agricultural development (including seeds and fertilizers, animal husbandry, dairy, poultry, fisheries, horticulture and food production and distribution), economic activities (including trade and industry), social services (including education, health and family planning, welfare, and housing), scientific and technical development, communications (including travel, tourism and transportation), rural and urban development, national integration and social change aimed at eradication of social evils was defined as development news (Vilanilam, 1976). In other words, except for diplomatic relations between nations, domestic politics, military/defense, crime, conflict and disaster stories which were defined as non-development news, all other topics were considered as relating to development news unless otherwise presented with a political or conflict orientation.

The main topic of news story was defined as that which concerns the kind of event or situation the story is mainly about. Twenty main topics with sub- categories as defined by Kirat et al. (1985) and modified by Dilawari et al. (1991) were identified.

Actors were individuals, groups or other entities doing things or affected by events in a way that they become essential to the story or commentary. The main actor was noted as the main subject of the story, around whom the story revolved. Stories that had children, common citizens or males and females in groups, crowds, public places and functions were coded as 'common people.'

Six coders coded the fifteen programmes. Four coders coded two programmes each and the remaining seven programmes were coded by the researchers of this study. In a test run, the six coders had an agreement level of 82.45 % in respect to 'main topic,' and an agreement level of 86.60 % in the case of 'main actors.'

Results

Out of a total of 566 stories, 358 stories (63.3%) were classified as domestic news and 190 stories (33.6%) were international news (excluding news submitted by such regional/international news organizations as United Nations TV and European Parliament).

Analysis of the Domestic News

An important finding, noted in Table 1, is that there was similarity in the coverage of development news in the domestic news offered by developed and developing countries (x^2 = 0.895, df=1, ns). In the handling of domestic news contributed stories in both developed and developing countries focused more on development news (developed: 68.5%, developing: 63.7%) than on non-development news.

Futhermore, in respect to region, all regions except Eastern Europe contributed development news more than non-development news (x^2 = 14.222, df=6, $p < .05$) (Table 2). But, in respect to the difference of proportions, the developed regions of 'North America' (79.2%) and 'Western Europe' (75.9%) focused more on development news than did the developing regions of 'Middle East' (70.4%), 'Latin America/Caribbean' (69.8%), 'Asia/Oceania' (62.3%), and 'Africa' (61.1%). Only 'Eastern Europe' contributed non-development news (52.0%) more than development news (which may have to do with the rather comprehensive changes going on in the political system there).

Examination of Table 3 reveals the attention given to the various news topics by developed and developing countries. Both blocs covered 'cultural/human interest/sports/ecology news' (developed: 50.9%, developing: 45.6%) and 'international/domestic political news' (developed: 19.4%, developing: 26.9%) more than other topics and the proportions were not significantly different (x^2 = 7.910, df=5, ns).

In terms of the distribution of main actors in the domestic news by developed and developing countries, the most frequently seen actors were 'common people' (32.7%), 'cultural/academics/scientists' (28.1%), and 'political/government officials' (20.9%) in the stories from the developed countries, while 'political/government officials' (38.2%), 'common people' (24.1%), and 'cultural/academics/scientists' (20.0%) appeared more frequently in the stories from the developing countries (x^2= 12.638, df=5, $p <$ .05) (Table 4).

Analysis of the International News

There was significant difference in the coverage of international news among developed and developing countries. Both developed and developing countries oriented their coverage more toward non-development news (developed: 54.3%, developing: 70.8%) in what they offered as international news. In fact, as a proportion of their respective contributions to the CNN World Report, the developed countries gave their international news a development orientation significantly more often than did the developing countries (x^2= 5.303, df= 1, $p <$ .05) (Table 5).

Futhermore, the comparison of development and non-development news by region showed that the proportions of non-development news from the developing regions of 'Middle East' (81.3%), 'Africa' (73.7%), and 'Asia/Oceania' (72.2%) were slightly higher than those of the developed regions of 'Eastern Europe' (68.8%), and 'North America' (66.7%) (x^2= 21.324, df =6, $p < .05$) (Table 6). Interestingly, 'Latin America/Caribbean' was the only region that covered development news (68.4%) more than non-development news (31.6%) in their international news content. And Western Europe contributed almost equal proportions of development news (51.2%) and non-development news (48.8%).

In terms of the distribution of main topics in the international news by developed and developing countries, developing countries (50.8%) focused significantly more on 'international/domestic political news' than did the developed countries (28.6%) (x^2= 12.879, df= 5, $p < .05$) (Table 7).

Table 8 shows who are the main actors in international news contributed to the CNN World Report by developed and develping countries. Although 'political/government officials' are the most frequent actors in the stories from both the developed (37.9%) and developing (56.0%) countries, developing countries covered a significantly higher percentage of the 'political/government officials' than did the developed countries (x^2= 14.928, df= 5, $p < .05$).

Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that there is not a significant difference in development orientation of domestic news contributed by developed and developing countries on CNN World Report; there is significant difference in the development orientation of international news offered.

This research suggests that the non-Western media, when given an open channel to the world, do not contribute more development oriented news than do the Western media.

In the NIICO and development journalism debates, the developing countries were no doubt its most strident proponents. In practice, it now appears the non-Western journalists are not necessarily the ones taking the lead, at least not in their contributions to the CNN international newscast. Contrary to expectation, the developed countries are using the CNN channel to relay much more news of a development orientation. Why? There may be several things happening at once. With an expanded news window, which the CNN World Report provides, there is more room for news of all types. With three minutes of news time guaranteed , there is more opportunity to present a mini-feature story, more time to go behind the headlines, and offer more than the breaking news story. In fact, time delays in assembling the weekly newscast require that that stories be more than the news of the moment. Meanwhile, in the developing world, journalists have seized upon the chance to report 'real news'- that is, hard news- for a change. They seem to have grown tired of 'government say-so' reporting and are increasingly operating in the Western mode, reporting stories in the way of regular CNN network reporters.

Also, the CNN World Report may be signaling a base change in the reporting of global television news now that the world is in such political flux and now that any country, because of the new ENG technologies, is increasingly able to speak for itself. Interestingly, the two regions that covered development news more than non-development news in their international news content were 'Latin America/Caribbean' and 'Western Europe.' It may be an indication of a new trend in the reporting of global TV news by all countries now that the world is less clearly divided into developed and developing blocs.

If CNN World Report is an example of the ideal NIICO newscast- in which countries are free to present their own news from their own perspectives- we may be seeing a new trend in the use of development journalism by both developed and developing countries. Namely, development news is as likely to come from the North as well as the South, the affluent as well as the poorer nations of the world.

Tables

Table 1.
Comparison of development news and non-development news in domestic news by developed and developing countries.

Topics	Developed countries		Developing countries	
	n	col. pct	n	col. pct
Development news	113	68.5	123	63.7
Non-development news	52	31.5	70	36.3
Total	165	(46.1)	193	(53.9)

$x^2 = 0.895$, df=1, ns

Table 2.
Comparison of development news and non-development news in domestic news by region.

Topics		Asia/ Oceania	Africa	Middle East	North America	Latin America /Caribb.	Eastern Europe	Western Europe
Development news	(N)	48	33	19	19	30	24	63
	(%)	62.3	61.1	70.4	79.2	69.8	48.0	75.9
Non-development news	(N)	29	21	8	5	13	26	20
	(%)	37.7	38.9	29.6	20.8	30.2	52.0	24.1
Total	(N)	77	54	27	24	43	50	83
	(%)	21.5	15.1	7.5	6.7	12.0	14.0	23.2

$\chi^2=14.222$, df=6, $p< .05$

Table 3.
Distribution of main topics in domestic news by developed and developing countries.

Topics	Developed countries		Developing countries	
	n	col. pct	n	col. pct
International/ domestic political news	32	19.4	52	26.9
Military/crime news	12	7.3	16	8.3
Economic/ industrial news	19	11.5	20	10.4
Internation aid/ social service news	10	6.1	15	7.8
Cultural/human interest/sports/ ecology news	84	50.9	88	45.6
Disaster news	8	4.8	2	1.0
Total	165	(46.1)	193	(53.9)

x^2 = 7.910, df =5, ns

Table 4.
Distribution of main actors in domestic news by developed and developing countries.

Actors	Developed countries		Developing countries	
	n	col. pct	n	col. pct
Political/govern. officials	32	20.9	65	38.2
Military/police/ criminals	8	5.2	10	5.9
Industry/ businessmen	13	8.5	12	7.1
Cultural/acad./ scientists	43	28.1	34	20.0
International/ regional org.	7	4.6	8	4.7
Common people	50	32.7	41	24.1
Total	153	(47.4)	170	(52.6)

$x^2 = 12.638$, df=5, $p < .05$

Table 5.
Comparison of development news and non-development news in international news by developed and developing countries.

Topics	Developed countries		Developing countries	
	n	col. pct	n	col. pct
Development news	32	45.7	35	29.2
Non-development news	38	54.3	85	70.8
Total	70	(36.8)	120	(63.2)

$x^2 = 5.303$, df=1, $p < .05$

Table 6.
Comparison of development news and non-development news in international news by region.

Topics		Asia/ Oceania	Africa	Middle East	North America	Latin America /Caribb.	Eastern Europe	Western Europe
Development news	(N)	10	5	9	3	13	5	22
	(%)	27.8	26.3	18.8	33.3	68.4	31.3	51.2
Non-development news	(N)	26	14	39	6	6	11	21
	(%)	72.2	73.7	81.3	66.7	31.6	68.8	48.8
Total	(N)	36	19	48	9	19	16	43
	(%)	18.9	10.0	25.3	4.7	10.0	8.4	22.6

$x^2 = 21.324$, $df = 6$, $p < .05$

Table 7.
Distribution of main topics in international news by developed and developing countries.

Topics	Developed countries		Developing countries	
	n	col. pct	n	col. pct
International/ domestic political news	20	28.6	61	50.8
Military/crime news	20	20.6	12	13.3
Economic/ indusrial news	11	15.7	9	7.5
International aid/ social service news	8	11.4	9	7.5
Cultural/human interest/sports/ ecology news	13	18.6	17	14.2
Disaster news	2	2.8	8	6.7
Total	70	(36.8)	120	(63.2)

$x^2 = 12.879$, df= 5, $p < .05$

Table 8.
Distribution of main actors in international news by developed and developing countries.

Actors	Developed countries		Developing countries	
	n	col. pct	n	col. pct
Political/govern. officials	25	37.9	56	56.0
Military/police/ criminals	10	15.2	7	6.0
Industry/ businessmen	8	12.1	2	1.7
Cultural/acad./ scientists	9	13.6	15	12.9
International/ regional org.	6	9.1	12	10.3
Common people	8	12.1	15	12.9
Total	66	36.3	116	63.7

$\chi^2 = 14.928$, df= 5, $p < .05$

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How Cable Television Network Programming Strategies Affect Time Spent Viewing

Presented at 1992 Conference of the
Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication
Montreal, Canada

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How Cable Television Network Programming Strategies Affect Time Spent Viewing

Abstract

The programming strategies of the major cable television networks differ widely. Two major structural differences are average program length and program repetition. Given the fragmentation of television channel audiences, advertisers should be interested in learning which channels attract greater viewer involvement, defined here as time spent viewing. This study looks at the relationship between the structural variables identified above and time spent viewing for twenty-one cable television networks.

How Cable Television Network Programming Strategies Affect Time Spent Viewing

It seems that everyone with an interest in the television industry is involved in speculating about what's "really" going on with audiences today. Individual channel audiences are smaller than they used to be, spread over many more options than were available in the past. Advertisers have trouble building a high reach media schedule, and capturing the same viewers multiple times to build frequency is a problem as well.

Qualitative studies of viewing behavior can help tremendously in painting a picture of how individuals are watching television (Brunsdon & Morley, 1978; Morley, 1986), but advertising media decisions still deal in the aggregate. The present study attempts to examine the effects of two relatively accessible structural variables, average program length and program repetition, on the amount of time viewers spend with particular cable channels over the course of a week. While there are still many questions to be answered before a complete picture of viewing behavior in the multi-channel environment can be drawn, the results of this study help to provide some insights.

Quantitative data from ratings reports can provide useful information on audience behavior, and behavioral tendencies may be viewed as a surrogate for audience involvement. In her review of the involvement literature, Zaichkowsky found evidence that increased advertising effectiveness is one of the results of increased involvement with the medium carrying the message (1986), so knowledge of which channels generate greater involvement would be useful for advertisers. Lloyd and Clancy (1991) found compelling evidence that advertising response improved as program involvement increased. Hoffman and Batra also offer support for the notion that television programs which foster high intellectual involvement are able to hold on to viewers' attention for the commercials airing during those programs (1991).

Quantitative assessments of involvement are not new. For example, DDB Needham has identified the "core" audience as a more involved audience, claiming that "there is a greater qualitative _intensity_ involved in core audience viewing behavior" (1983, p. 21). Their definition of core audience membership is behavioral and quantifiable: the core audience for a weekly television program is made up of those viewers who watched either three or four of the last four episodes of the program (1983, p.6). Thus, the tendency of a viewer to return to the same program over time is an indication of greater involvement with that program by that viewer than by others who watch it less often.

Behavioral consistency has also been identified as one of the components of brand loyalty. Jacoby and Chestnut defined brand loyalty as: "(1) the biased (i.e., nonrandom), (2) behavioral response (i.e., purchase), (3) expressed over time, (4) by some decision-making unit, (5) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (6) is a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) processes" (1978, p. 80-81). This same definition can be applied to our behavioral measure of audience involvement, time spent viewing. The amount of time the average viewer of a channel spends viewing that particular channel can be determined from ratings data.

It should be noted that reliance on a behavioral measure of involvement is not out of keeping with more traditional audience analyses. Advocates of the uses and gratifications stream of research have identified media exposure as a source of audience gratification (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 24), and media exposure is a behavioral response captured in ratings data. Further, a channel involvement measure defined as time spent viewing goes beyond mere exposure to the television medium, reflecting a decision to select a particular channel over others. This interpretation is in keeping with the view expressed by Webster and Wakshlag, "that while the decision to use television is typically passive, once that commitment is made, viewers actively choose among the options before them" (1983, pp. 437-438). And as Gans has noted, "intentional usage...implies high involvement" (1980, p. 62). Time spent viewing makes a distinction between television viewing per se and the choice of a specific channel to view.

Although not frequently discussed in advertising media planning, the use of time spent viewing as a measure of involvement does have application. DDB Needham views the core, or loyal, audience as being more receptive to advertising messages in "their" program:

> Media vehicles also have personalities. If we can marry the correct media vehicle with the correct product and then advertise that product frequently on that one program or in that one magazine, we can create a bond between the product and the consumer that will be hard to break (1983, p. 5).

Although the reference here is to specific programs, the same may hold for cable channels featuring specialized programming, or a differentiated "personality." In fact, with cable networks, overall time spent viewing may be the more relevant frame of reference for an advertiser. At present, Nielsen does not provide ratings or audience composition information for individual cable network programs, but only for dayparts. Advertising agencies must rely on the broader daypart information when planning schedules.

Knowledge of which channels generate greater viewing time from their audiences could also be used by advertisers to develop advertising exposure frequency schedules. If the media strategy for a product calls for exposing the target audience to the promotional message repeatedly, advertisements could be placed on a channel known to generate relatively high time spent viewing from the desired audience. DDB Needham has successfully experimented with this approach on a program basis (1983).

What Determines Time Spent Viewing?

In trying to compete in the increasingly crowded television programming marketplace, cable television networks have experimented with a number of audience (and advertiser) attraction approaches. These include specializing in a particular type of programming (as practiced by MTV and ESPN, for example), specializing in a particular audience (the approach used by Nickelodeon and BET, among others), or mimicking the broadcast networks in offering something for everyone (used by networks such as USA and WTBS). Decisions on programming structure, including program length and program repetition, are related to these strategic approaches.

Program length, which is usually tied to the program type(s) chosen, varies greatly among the cable networks. MTV, VH-1, and The Weather Channel offer very short programs of music videos and weather reports, each lasting only a few minutes. At the other extreme, HBO and Showtime program feature films that are generally one and one-half to two hours in length. Scheduling strategies, including the flow of programs in a network's schedule, have been identified as an important element in audience program choice (Webster & Wakshlag, 1983; Webster, 1985), and, consequently, in channel choice.

Webster and Wakshlag have also noted that "program scheduling characteristics are among the few variables that have isolated clear patterns in program choice over time" (1983, p. 434). Many cable television networks have adopted a strategy of repeating programming frequently, which has been documented by Wildman and Lee (1989). For example, the Arts & Entertainment Network repeats half of its programming daily. This programming strategy is designed to conserve resources, allowing the network to provide higher quality, though less varied, programming.

Despite groans about reruns, program repetition can benefit audiences. Wildman and Lee have pointed out that "the more frequently a program is aired, the more likely it is that it will be convenient, or accessible, to a particular viewer, who must make time for activities other than watching television" (1989, p. 2). The important role of viewer availability in program (and, consequently, channel) choice has also been assessed by Webster and Wakshlag, who have identified it as "the single factor which is most responsible for the absence of content-based patterns of viewing" (1983, p. 438). Program repetition can aid in overcoming constraints on viewing caused by availability.

It seems logical that average program length and program repetition might affect viewers' decisions on which channels to watch and for how long. Networks whose programming is made up primarily of longer programs should generate greater time spent viewing simply because the longer programs should aid in increasing involvement and thus holding onto viewers, assuming that most viewers would not switch to or from a channel in the middle of a program. However, this presumption is by no means a given. Gerken has documented that "generally, longer duration programs have a greater potential for people to enter and leave the telecast, generating greater turnover" (1989, p. 126). And, in a recent study of television viewer volatility, Nielsen also reported higher audience turnover rates for longer programs (1992).

Conversely, increased program repetition would likely depress time spent viewing a particular channel. Having seen a program once, the viewer is unlikely to allocate time to watching the same program again. Barwise and Ehrenberg have documented that with repeated programming, "the audience is usually smaller than for the initial screening" (1988, p. 46). Thus, while a practice of repeating programs eases access for the audience by ameliorating the problem of availability, it would also serve to decrease overall time spent viewing the channel. To the extent that cable television networks use program repetition to conserve resources, they may decrease the amount of time their audience gives to the channel.

It is important to draw a distinction here between repetition within a channel's programming and the use of aftermarket programming. The former refers to a channel's repeating a program that aired earlier on the channel. The latter is the common cable network practice of repeating broad-appeal programs taken from other media, including the broadcast networks and motion pictures (Waterman & Grant, 1991). Waterman and Grant have documented the popularity of aftermarket programming on cable networks, particularly programming picked up from the broadcast networks (1991).

Research Hypotheses

Based on the preceding discussion, the following factors are predicted to affect time spent viewing:

H1: Average program length will be positively related to audience involvement. Longer programs encourage greater time spent viewing.

H2: Program repetition will be negatively related to audience involvement. High degrees of program repetition should depress time spent viewing.

Method

Audience measurement data from *Nielsen Homevideo Index: Cable Activity Report* (first quarter 1989) was used to determine time spent viewing during an average week for the networks included in the analysis. (Table 1 lists the networks studied.) While ratings data can be taken directly from the report, time spent viewing (TSV) requires some additional computation. The following formula was used:

$$\underset{\text{in quarter hrs}}{\text{TSV}} = \frac{\text{QHs X AQH Audience}}{\text{Cume Audience}}$$

where QHs = number of quarter hours in the network's weekly programming

AQH Audience = number of viewers in the network's audience during an average quarter hour

Cume Audience = total number of persons in the
channel's audience during the week

(Wimmer, Eastman, & Meyer, 1989, p. 74).

The resulting figure, the number of quarter hours the average viewer of the network spent with the network, was then divided by four, resulting in a measure of TSV in hours. Higher TSV indicates greater audience involvement. Note that TSV will be higher in situations where the size of the average quarter hour audience is large relative to the cume audience, that is, in situations where there is little audience turnover.

Table 1 goes here

Program repetition. The degree of program repetition for each cable network was determined using a repetition measure developed by Wildman and Lee (1989). This measure is a percentage expression of the proportion of total programming hours consisting of repeated programming, that is, programming which has already aired during the time period.

Wildman and Lee examined January 1989 programming schedules for twelve of the twenty-one cable networks included in this analysis. Their figures are used here, with the exception of CNN. The Wildman and Lee repetition figure reflects the fact that CNN runs separate news programs throughout the day, each of which is separately produced, resulting in additional costs for the station (the focus of Wildman and Lee's analysis). However, as our analysis has an audience behavior focus, we deemed it more appropriate to recognize that news is only "new" once, resulting in greater repetition than identified by Wildman and Lee. (The same principle was applied to programming on the Headline News Network.)

Program repetition measures were calculated for those cable networks not studied by Wildman and Lee. In cases where it was not possible to determine program repetition directly from a network's programming schedule (taken either from the network's own programming guide or a weekly guide printed in the Chicago Tribune (TV Week, 1989)), the network was contacted to arrive at an estimation of repetition. While repetition values for networks in the latter category may not be as exact as those calculated directly from program schedules, the relative level of repetition should be accurate.

Average program length. Average program length was calculated by counting the number of programs aired on the network during the period and dividing that number into the total number of minutes in the programming period, resulting in average program length in minutes.

Because the syndicated service reports for cable television focus on an average week, both program repetition and average program length were calculated across the month of January 1989 for each network in recognition of some networks' practice of varying programming from week to week.

Time spent viewing, average program length, and program repetition values for all twenty-one cable networks are shown in

Table 2. The networks are ordered from greatest to least time spent viewing, or greatest to least audience involvement. (Values for the three broadcast networks are shown for comparison purposes.)

Table 2 goes here

Statistical analysis. Multiple regression was used to assess the effect of the independent variables on time spent viewing. Since the research hypotheses did not deal with the relative predictive power of the independent variables, the stepwise method was selected as most appropriate for this analysis.

Results

Both average program length and program repetition are positively correlated with time spent viewing; however, only the average program length correlation is significant. (The correlation matrix is shown in Table 3.) Each has the effect of increasing time spent viewing, indicating that audience involvement is statistically greater for those cable channels which air longer programs, and directionally greater for those networks that repeat programs more frequently. The significant average program length variable explains 43% of the variance in time spent viewing for the cable networks in the analysis. (The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 4.)

Table 3 goes here

Table 4 goes here

Average program length is positively and significantly correlated with time spent viewing (r=.66, p<.001), supporting H1. This strong positive relationship would seem to contradict the beliefs of many observers of television audience behavior who feel that the audience loses interest in programming quickly. For example, Morgan has claimed that "there's a twitchiness to the younger generation that has half-hour sitcoms taxing their attention spans" (1990, p. 2). While it does appear that many of those cable networks which program to attract a younger audience (Nickelodeon, Nick at Nite, MTV) do air shorter programs, this analysis suggests that networks which schedule longer programs do not suffer from lack of viewer involvement.

Contrary to H2, program repetition is positively correlated with time spent viewing (r=.21), although the correlation is not significant. Barwise and Ehrenberg (1988) have identified programming cost constraints as a major barrier to successful narrowcast channels. The finding that program repetition does not significantly affect time spent viewing lends support to the practice of repeating programming used by many cable networks as a cost reduction measure is a viable solution to the programming cost problem.

The results of the analysis indicate that the structural variable of average program length is an important predictor of time spent viewing for cable television networks. Contrary to the beliefs of many television industry observers (Gerken, 1989; Morgan, 1990), channels are not penalized for airing longer programs. The viewing measure used here looks at viewing over a week-long period, and does not account for switching into or out of programs in progress on a channel. However, the results strongly suggest that channels which air longer programs are more successful in generating audience involvement than are those which air shorter programs.

Another means of exploring the relationship between average program length and time spent viewing is through a measure which assesses the average number of "programs" watched by a channel viewer. The "programs watched" figure in Table 5 was obtained by dividing time spent viewing (in minutes) by average program length for each cable network. The networks are listed in descending order of number of programs watched weekly by the average viewer of the network.

Table 5 goes here

The "programs watched" treatment of time spent viewing and program length may be an appropriate way of looking at involvement in a channel's programming from the audience's view. For example, a person who watches almost 38 forecasts on The Weather Channel in the course of a week may consider themselves to be a regular or frequent viewer of that channel, even though that viewing accounted for less than two hours in total. Time spent viewing has greater applicability throughout the television industry than does "programs watched," but may have less meaning for audience members than it does for researchers.

Conclusions

While this analysis cannot begin to address all of the issues involved in examining audience behavior in the multichannel environment, it does demonstrate that advertisers need not throw up their hands in despair over how to sort out the multiple options available.

Time spent viewing, easily calculable from ratings data, offers another way of evaluating television networks. The analysis presented here shows that the major measured cable networks differ markedly in their ability to hold audience attention over a programming week. An advertiser wanting to build a frequency schedule might choose to advertise heavily on a network like WTBS, which has relatively high time spent viewing. Conversely, building frequency on VH-1 would be difficult, since the average VH-1 viewer spends little more than an hour with that network weekly.

The results also suggest that advertisers should keep structural variables in mind when evaluating networks. Average program length is easily measured, and plays an important role in determining the level of behavioral viewer involvement a network can command over the course of a week. Conversely, the results suggest that advertisers need not be overly concerned about the level of repetition in a channel's programming.

Table 1
Cable Television Networks Included in the Analysis

- Arts & Entertainment Daytime
- Arts & Entertainment Nighttime
- Black Entertainment Television
- Cable News Network
- The Discovery Channel
- ESPN
- Financial News Network
- The Family Channel
- Headline News Network
- Home Box Office
- Lifetime
- MTV
- The Nashville Network
- Nickelodeon
- Nick at Nite
- Showtime
- Turner Network Television
- USA Network
- VH-1
- The Weather Channel
- WTBS

Table 2

Network	Time Spent Viewing	Avg. Program Length	Repeat hours/ Total hours
ABC	9:54	56.6 mins.	1.6
CBS	10:12	51.4	2.8
NBC	10:30	46.7	6.6
HBO	8:36	81.0	79.1
Showtime	7:48	94.4	71.4
WTBS	4:12	55.9	3.8
TNT	3:18	87.9	2.3
USA Network	3:12	48.4	6.3
The Family Channel	3:12	49.9	16.0
CNN	3:12	44.2	57.7
Nickelodeon	3:06	35.0	14.8
MTV	3:00	5.6	65.4
ESPN	2:48	51.2	27.5
Arts & Entert. PM	2:36	51.9	50.0
Headline News	2:18	30.0	91.7
Lifetime	2:18	49.7	17.0
TNN	2:06	38.4	63.4
BET	2:06	45.0	47.0
The Discovery Channel	2:00	39.1	55.4
The Weather Channel	1:54	6.5	60.0
Nick at Nite	1:30	35.6	25.7
Arts & Entert. AM	1:18	45.4	32.7
VH-1	1:06	5.0	73.4
Financial News Net.	:48	49.4	15.7

Table 3
Correlation Matrix
Dependent Variable = Time Spent Viewing (TSV)

Variables	2	3	$\bar{x}$	s.d.
1. Time Spent Viewing	.659*	.205	2.98	1.94
2. Average Program Length	--	-.301	45.05	23.74
3. Program Repetition		--	42.62	28.59

*p<.001

Table 4
Determinants of Time Spent Viewing

Independent Variables:	Unstandardized Coefficients (T value) Step 1	Step 2
Average Program Length	.054 (3.82)	.065 (5.16)
Program Repetition	--	.030 (2.89)
Constant	.547	-1.231
R2	.43	.61
Overall F	14.61	14.30
df	1,19	2,18

All figures in parentheses are T values significant at $p<.01$.

Each overall F value was significant at $p<.001$.

Table 5
Average Number of Programs Watched

Network	Programs Watched
ABC	10.5
CBS	11.9
NBC	13.5
The Weather Channel	37.8
MTV	32.6
VH-1	12.6
HBO	6.4
Nickelodeon	5.3
Showtime	5.0
Headline News	4.7
WTBS	4.5
CNN	4.3
USA Network	4.0
The Family Channel	3.9
ESPN	3.3
TNN	3.3
The Discovery Channel	3.1
Arts & Entertainment Nighttime	3.0
BET	2.8
Lifetime	2.7
Nick at Nite	2.6
TNT	2.3
Arts & Entertainment Daytime	1.7
Financial News Network	.9

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THE RODNEY KING TAPE AND THE VIEWER'S ROLE IN THE RITUALS OF TV NEWS--SEEING WAS BELIEVING

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Presented to
Qualitative Studies Division,
AEJMC Annual Convention,
Montreal, August 7, 1992

THE RODNEY KING TAPE AND THE VIEWER'S ROLE IN THE RITUALS OF TV NEWS--SEEING WAS BELIEVING

The videotape was as riveting as it was offensive. Five uniformed police officers--for an interminable time--used their solid aluminum truncheons as baseball bats on a nearly prostrate black man, a man who had already been shot--twice--with a Taser high-voltage stun-gun. The beating went on so long various officers had time to drive up, watch a few seconds and drive away.

Throughout, the spotlight from a hovering police helicopter unwittingly provided stage lighting for the tableau, which was recorded for posterity by a Sony home camcorder operated in secret. The videographer, manager of a plumbing business in North Hollywood in "real life," taped the drama from a second-story apartment balcony. George Holliday, a public-spirited citizen practicing with his new camera, earned $500 for his candid shots from a local television station (he subsequently filed suit demanding more money).

The March 2, 1991, tape, first shown by Los Angeles station KTLA, aired on Cable News Network the next day and then on the national network news shows, not once, but repeatedly. In the ensuing weeks, virtually any time a story associated with either police brutality, law enforcement, or Los Angeles appeared (and the tape itself generated many such stories), the videotape appeared as both background and foreground. It became emblematic of troubled race relations, of venal corruption of police power, of the authority of the state versus the rights of the individual.

This visual story symbolizing racism and brutality in the Los Angeles Police gained momentum quickly. The story of LAPD brutality was an old one--it had been reported before, but earlier versions of it disappeared like April snowflakes until the King tape. The privileging of sight over other senses, as print had been privileged over oral traditions centuries before, gave the King tape realism. News media exposure, followed by the Christopher Commission investigation, moved the debate from the small arena of a singular assault on one suspected felon to the use of force by the state through police departments everywhere. At each juncture, the amateur's famous tape, or portions of it, aired again.

Over the next few months, continuing news reports on other incidents and subsequent analysis through the media helped the nation learn about, live through and ultimately in some ways profit from this assault on one man on one night. The ramifications of this one incident exceeded expectations, not because it happened, but because of the videotape and the uses made of it. It was news coverage--and the repeated airing of that tape--that made the beating of Rodney King almost immediately an event worthy of riveting national attention. The news media, once it had our collective attention, then told us what sense to make out of this "senseless act," and who was at fault, all the way up to the police chief. In this the news media performed a modern version of the ancient rituals, those collections of repetitive, symbolic patterns of behavior which serve to unify a community and culture.

How the news media enact this ritual, the importance of it to the national culture, and how this technologically enhanced process reifies our social beliefs, is the focus here. This essay explores what has become a rather routine process in the treatment of certain "nationalized" events, operating throughout our culture via mass media, and draws a distinction between the consumption and repetition of video images in this process and the narrative news structures that accompany it. Because the process is so ubiquitous and its assumptions so commonplace in news practices, the significance of the process to the national culture (probably better described as a complex cultural system) is largely ignored.

Perhaps at least a cursory overview of the development of myth and ritual analysis will be useful here. Myth and ritual analysis stems from psychoanalytic criticism and anthropological analysis, augmented and extended by subsequent work in cultural studies and semiotics. The concepts of myth and ritual, as applied to a contemporary collective psyche, were developed by Freud's disciple Carl Jung, and amplified by literary critics such as Northrop Frye. Jung's focus was on individual psychology melded with a collective unconscious that he said infused individual attitudes and acts through the modeling of collective archetypes. Frye and others used literature in its broadest sense as their data base, as would those who followed his tradition. He and others, critics as varied in viewpoint as Lionel Trilling and Joseph Campbell, found these patterns of myth and ritual and their uses to exist throughout the discursive products of human creation. They exist in news rituals, too.

James Carey in *Communication as Culture* (1989) defined the ritual process of communication as linked to terms such as "sharing," "participation," "association," "fellowship," and "the possession of a common faith." Mass communication's operation in this framework can be viewed as the maintenance of society across time, as a kind of sacred ceremony, as much for confirmation as for information (18-19). For participants (something more than passive viewers and readers, though that is how they are generally perceived), if not for producers, the news process is a shared ceremony. The ceremony of nightly news enables the audience (an even further abstraction of "reader") to make concrete, transcendent sense of the chaos of world, national, even local events.

Myth is one of those general, all-encompassing terms that is difficult to define precisely. All cultures seem to have variants of certain myths, ranging from mother earth to the hero on a quest to rites of passage. Here, the concept of "myth" is used as stories, figures, situations that work as a bridge between individuals and their culture, between their distant and hazy past and all too real present; between their dreams, goals and fears, and their present limited possibilities. Myths are expressed through narratives, some heroic, some formulaic, some a kind of publicly shared dream. What they possess in common is an attempt to identify and express some fundamental shared level of cultural experience, as evidenced in words and deeds throughout history (see i.e. Silverstone 1988, 23, and Real 1989). Myths persist, often in transformed or diluted versions, throughout a given culture and among cultures, across the dimension of time.

Ritual is to myth what action is to belief. It is through rituals that we embody cultural beliefs. More than that, it is through rituals that we make sense of the world and help keep chaos at bay. Ritual provides a means of receiving and acting upon that which is beyond our realm of immediate experience, whether in relation to concepts of God or to forces outside our understanding or control.

Individuals and their societies, even in complex, highly technological forms, seem to need ritual as a means of creating and culling out meaning, no matter how secular and worldly they become. Cultures evolve from the values and beliefs that are reflected in and expressed through ritual. Modern examples include the rituals of graduation commencement, or the Super Bowl. To ethnologist Clifford Geertz, ritual is rooted in the religious impulse, and provides a useable, if sometimes indistinct, conception of the order of existence. "In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world," thus producing a transformation of one's sense of reality (Geertz 1973, 112-113). Another observer of culture, Victor Turner, wrote extensively about the contemporary social uses of ritual. He noted ritual is linked to performance, and found it useful to view ritual "essentially as *performance*, as *enactment*, and not primarily as rules or rubrics. The rules frame the ritual process, but the ritual process transcends its frame" (Turner 1981, 155-6).

The common narratives that incorporate myth and ritual, where they are embodied in our national rituals, do much to reassure us, even in the secular and technology-driven twentieth century where humankind has positioned itself as God of at least the material world. These cultural narratives also define and clarify the boundary between the familiar world of common sense, rationality and patterns of every day experience, and the uncontrolled world of the unfamiliar, with its dimly understood, often threatening, unpatterned forces, whether they stem from an internal id, the irrational exercise of state power, or the myriad external forces threatening us, from tornados to crime. Such underlying patterns supporting the narratives are fundamental to our concepts of and performances of news. Discussion of "news" here includes audience reception. Production is central to the ritualized process, but the pattern is so ingrained among producers, reporters and editors that it is viewed by them as little more than practitioners' professional agreement on "news," "good stories," and accepted production values.

News performances, as both ritual and conveyor of information, have long roots. Mitchell Stephens in his *History of News* (1988) notes that Englishmen of three centuries ago, who had little in the way of news sources other than small coffeehouse publications, thought their society was obsessed with news. Little has changed in 300 years. News as descriptions and distillations of events, has always been fundamental to the operation of cultures, whether constituted of gossip passed orally from village to village, news of war carried to Greek states via fleet-footed runners, or instant transmission by satellite of events from a gulf on the opposite side of the earth.

This obsession with news--with communication--reflects more than a need to tell, to gossip, to hear. It reflects the side of us that must know, whose cultural, social and sometimes even physical survival depends upon that knowing, upon being able to discern and explore the border between the familiar and the unfamiliar through the use of rituals and patterns undergirding the channels of information.

In his analysis of the founding American myths, historian Richard Slotkin (1973) calls mythmaking both a psychological and a social activity. The myth is articulated by individual "artists" (analogous in role to reporters and producers) and separately affects each individual member of the audience to varying degrees, but with the function of reconciling and uniting all those individualities into a collective identity through a kind of collective participation (8). Individual stories are the artifacts of myths, from which evolve icons and ritualizations, from symbolic ceremonies (like inaugurations and press conferences) to news routines (like today's coverage of last night's crimes).

Using examples from another visual medium--film--the all-encompassing cultural myth may be the hero on a quest in the universe. The specific myth-artifact in American popular culture in 1991 was a visual retelling of the Robin Hood or Peter Pan stories, stories about heroes who battled the forces of evil. The unique elements at work here begin with the characters' one-dimensional, heroic nature. Other elements include fantasies heightened by elaborate costuming, special effects, and physical derring-do, with periodic confrontations with completely villainous enemies like Captain Hook or the Sheriff of Nottingham. The rituals include the repetitive patterns of confrontations with enemies where the hero emerges unscathed if not triumphant, and the plot developments drawing sharp divisions between good and evil. For the millions here and overseas who participated by attending the movies, the ritual included reading/seeing the communications hype in news coverage as well as media advertising, sitting communally in a darkened theater after paying $5 or $6 each for the privilege, and vicariously experiencing this mythic struggle in the two-hour confines of an incredibly elaborate, high-tech cultural production.

However, although viewers happily suspend disbelief for the duration of a movie for the purposes of whatever gratification it provides, few in the audience would ever view these mythic creative products as being very close to the edge of their personal reality or experiences, or anyone else's, for that matter. Their experience of the ritualistic struggles on screen includes a predictable ending, safe surroundings and the constant awareness that "it's only a movie," no matter what happens to the audience visually, aurally, emotionally.

Not so with real events and news coverage of them. That involves a different level of awareness and conception of reality, although individual expectations and perceptions of reality may certainly be influenced by fictional creations. However, when a gunman slaughters cafeteria diners in a small Texas town, a DC-10 airliner crash in Iowa kills half its passengers, or a San Francisco Bay earthquake results in death and damages of $7 billion, modern media audiences are made all too aware that forces outside their control threaten and take lives almost at random. The presentation of "news" events, like the King tape, also fits into a ritualized mythos.

In the assault of Rodney King, first radio traffic alerted officers and the media that police officers were involved in a high-speed chase of King's white Hyundai. King, 25, was on probation at the time, having served a year in prison for the $200 robbery of a grocery store. He supposedly believed (mistakenly) that a speeding ticket would for him constitute a probation violation. He finally stopped at a traffic light (after running several), and supposedly resisted arrest. In total, the officers who surrounded King hit him 56 times with their batons, and several kicked him repeatedly in the head and elsewhere as he lay semi-conscious on the ground. Officers, in their reports, claimed he suffered only minor cuts and abrasions. In reality King ended up with almost a dozen bones broken at the base of his skull, a cheek fracture, damage to facial nerves, a severe concussion and a broken ankle. In a subsequent suit against the LAPD, King's attorneys said he suffered permanent damage from the beating.

Those who watched the videotape marvelled that he survived the beating at all at the hands of those community agents customarily sworn to "protect and serve." As the newscasts replayed the videotape of the beating, viewers saw over and over again, from the camera's perspective over the border of the highway fence, the savagery of the moment, a glimpse of unrestrained violence. Over and over again viewers became voyeur participants in what happened, left feeling angry and confused because the criminal became the victim and the police became the criminals. The broadcasts also led to resolution, explanation, and finally satisfaction that this terrible wrong was being righted, in that the system was moving to indict the officers responsible. The resulting firestorm (and subsequent news media revelations of other police misconduct) burned a path to the department's ultimate boss, Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates, who bristled but eventually agreed to early retirement.

The repetition of the tape ritualized it, creating an emblem for troubled race relations in America's ongoing struggle to maintain law and order without abuse of state power in the face of growing concerns about crime--especially black crime. The ritualized daily TV news coverage of urban crime earlier reinforced that particular stereotype. Undoubtedly the television news producers and newscasters did not consciously intend either of these outcomes. Their news production values and practices, and the riveting quality and subject matter of the King tape, made them view the tape for its other qualities, as the dramatic footage and lead-in it most certainly provided to all subsequent related stories. But there is something more here than the retelling that ritualized it.

Semiologist Roland Barthes (1985) made an important distinction about the unique nature of photographic media and their reception that is important. In talking about the analysis of images, he calls the photograph a kind of code-less representation, where the relationship between signifieds and signifiers is simply present. Interventions, such as framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed, all simply provide a connotation, not a transformation of the subject, as in other forms of visual representation. What is more, the photograph provides the viewer an inescapable awareness of its actually "having-been-there," itself causing a disjunction in time and space, a kind of real unreality. And film (or videotape) takes that process one disorienting step further. It replaces the "having-been-there" with a kind immediate present, a sense of "being-there." Because the nature of photography, for the first time in human experience, gives us a message without a translation code in the telling, it and videotape are causing a "mutation of informational economies" (200-201). They also have transformed news from something that was more often observation and interpretation to something more akin to transmission.

Thus, the use of videotape makes the rituals of twentieth-century America and beyond distinctly different from their forebears, even among the media, an intra-media difference that sets TV news apart from other forms of news media. Seeing the videotapes of the Rodney King beating and its aftermath is a fundamentally different level of experience than is reading about it, even with a vivid account and a vivid imagination, as was demonstrated in the dozens of police brutality reports filed with the LAPD and even written about in the press in the years prior to the broadcast of the King tape. Another important element here, although corollary to ritualization, is the fact that a member of the viewing audience had the equipment in hand to record this incident for all to see forever in time, to transmit his experience as voyeur to the rest of the audience, directly, without intervention of either artistic conventions, news conventions, or state secrecy. The egalitarian spread of such technology has enhanced the raw material, the pictures, which TV news practices require.

For the TV viewer, seeing the King videotape served to make the unfamiliar, topsy-turvy world of assault and violence at the hands of protectors "real" and somehow familiar, pushing the envelope of familiar out into the shadowy, seldom-traversed world of the unfamiliar. Such experiences and recounted visual events thus become, for a time, a part of our internalized daily environment and later our collective experience, our sense of history.

That experience transcends having knowledge of the events, which often consists of only a vague awareness and limited connectedness. It becomes actually seeing and experiencing the events, over and over, in a ritualistic process. In the privileging of sight over other senses, we believe what we see with our own two eyes, and we are jarred by the stunning visual demonstration, despite prior knowledge of the existence of police brutality, of the dimensions and horror of it. Although "entertainment" violence and horror, also graphic and "seen" through the magic of special effects, is emotionally riveting, we know it is not "real" in the way news reports are accepted as "real." (New digitization technology may call even that visual "reality" to task, but that is another issue).

Seeing, vicariously experiencing, also makes a single dimension of time, a kind of continuing present that melds history and future. On another dimension, humans with their cerebrums and endless quest for causality, need to make rational sense of what they have seen, and still rely on news interpreters to give them that sense. In past ages, sense of chaotic events was made by shamans, medicine men, seers, philosophers, ascetics, saints, scientists, even occasionally politicians. Today, when a calamitous event occurs, people are hungry for news and information about the effects, dimensions and causes of that event, again hoping to make the unfamiliar familiar by the act of knowing it, whether it is the explosion of the Challenger, the vagaries of wind-whipped fires destroying homes in Oakland, or the senseless, savage beating of a defenseless man by those men in uniform who embody law and order.

Even as we see the tapes of events or their aftermath reporters and anchors tell us almost immediately about their dimensions, about their statistics, about the victims, about the heroes and villains (if any can be identified) about the experts' speculations as to cause and effect, in the process of analysis and rationalization as well as ritualization. Yet chaos is never far removed from our lives, no matter how much we structure and pattern our existence.

An important part of the ritual, of exploring the border between familiar and unfamiliar in the search for explanation, order and rationality, is to retell the incident in human terms, by putting it in a distinctly human perspective. News practitioners quickly comply. Thus we begin to hear the human interest angles, the narratives of the lucky and unlucky survivors in a disaster, or about the individual impacts of this course of political action or that, or the status reports on those involved in the drama. Victims become features, and the features tell reassuring, reaffirming or even repellent "stories." Many of these narratives are tales of moral imperatives and displays of courage or evil fit for any religious myth.

Another of the repetitive elements in the ritual of news practice and audience expectations is the cultural imperative to create a framing for heroes and villains. Humans do not want to believe forces do not have controllable causes, whether the cause is a few "bad" police officers (despite the fact that 19 other officers observed the King beating and none either intervened or reported the abuse of power) or a "bad" corrupt bureaucracy led by a villain (here Gates and his department).

Reporters and experts use professional skills to quickly assemble workman-like analyses of events and their parameters, peeling the layers of the onion away. News--like myth--rests on its ring of authority as the conduit for truth. The culture (incarnate in the audience) puts its trust in specialists, brought to them by the media, who have access to the "truth," especially in those areas that are unfamiliar. The raw visual material evokes explanations. And as critical theorist Michel Foucault noted, those who control "the word" are those with the power. Power is "strong" because it produces effects "at the level of desire--and also at the level of knowledge" (59). Power is also found in processes and procedures that have become accepted as professional and cultural norms, in police work as in television journalism, from processes of objectification to enforced behavior codes. Journalists have the power--and the audience's sanction--to fit new situations into old ritualistic patterns, such as putting people and events into a paradigmatic frame of good vs. bad, hero vs. villain, rational vs. irrational, thereby giving their stories the added authority of mythological truth. That process strikes a resonant chord in the culture, in the receivers, enabling it to "work" on the level of ritual as well as the level of imparting information.

We privilege news reports as dispensing both reality and truth, particularly when they come with pictures, now *de rigeur* for television news. We have come to expect from them these ritual patterns and code stories that help us make the unfamiliar both real and familiar, and thus perhaps amenable to understanding if not control. One of the powerful linguistic devices commonly used to express and reinforce these cultural patterns is still the use of metaphor, the application of words from what is familiar and comfortable to describe that which is not (see Ricoeur 1979, 141-157).

John Fiske (1987) in a study charted the most common types of metaphor used to describe politics on the news programs of three major networks. War metaphors (i.e. language such as "battle," "trenches," "shot down") were the most plentiful in describing politics, followed by metaphors taken from sports and drama. He noted in particular that the use of metaphors from drama helps define politics as a "stage" upon which talented individuals perform as "stars" (291-292), and that this view fosters distortion of the political process. Appropriate or not, such metaphors are comfortable for news commentator and audience both. Indeed, they are expected.

The coverage of the beating of Rodney King and other national events provide examples of mythic framing of the news stories and their ritual uses by an increasingly fragmented nation of disparate audiences. It is the nature of network news coverage to bring us events in pictures in which we can participate as a nation, creating a sense of unity, however false. Television technology fosters this collective, yet curiously isolated involvement, to an extent and with an immediacy never before realized. This was demonstrated most cogently perhaps in the recent coverage of the Persian Gulf war, where television's satellite conveyor belt made instantaneous visual news coverage possible (albeit unrefined and unedited, rather like Holliday's balcony tape).

The news media are frequently accused of manipulating coverage of events or of emphasizing coverage of crime and disasters to fit their narrow definitions and predispositions about what is newsworthy. Theorists have ascribed their motives to simple transactions in commodification, as efforts to boost ratings for reasons of simple economics or ego gratification or both, as efforts to maintain status quo power relationships and narcotize the classes to maintain order, or simply because their news staffs are routinized and lazy. None of these interpretations leave much room for the audience's role in the process other than as objects of manipulation.

There is another view, the one explored here. The media also re-enact, with potent new omnipresent reality machines, an ages-old pattern of myth and ritual that serves to explain, protect, extend and codify the existing culture. They do it not only with new and marvelous tools, but also with ever more complex levels of rationalization and adherence to production standards. In an increasingly secular culture, they have become the new mediators between the familiar and the unfamiliar. They also provide us a means of national catharsis in a process that serves to unify our culture and our political and social structures in a way that religion no longer can, and politics probably never will.

Aristotle held that drama, the seminal visual spectacle closely connected to modern-day visual spectacles, did not inflame the passions, but instead cleansed and released the passions through its offer of vicarious experiences (1957, 223-265). Such a communal catharsis can also serve to temper emotions, to educate about the emotions, and to ratify the collectivity of those emotions. To have consciousness is to be all too aware of forces outside one's control in the human condition. The ritualization in coverage of national news events, with the symbolic repetitions of key pieces of visual documentation--whether the King beating, the Challenger explosion or the Kennedy assassination--provides that catharsis, on a national and communal basis as well as a personal level. It allows for internalization of these events into a common ground of experience.

This process of ritual, repetition and catharsis may be one of the most important and least understood functions of television news, particularly as the mythmaking power and function of other cultural institutions is reduced. The coverage of the assault of Rodney King was not itself unique, although certainly dramatic and passion-stirring. Its rise to ritualized use demonstrates this power of seeing, connected across time, to the process of believing and internalizing. It is another dimension of news and information, an important one, with cross-cultural connections to drama and spectacle. It also infuses the news practices and customs now taken for granted. Cultural rituals pervade routine news coverage and reception of national news events. That aspect of media criticism, which allows for an active rather than passive audience response and involvement, deserves more attention and study for its role in "news" and news coverage.

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Video News Releases: Breaching the Covenant with Viewers

by

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Presented to the Radio-TV Division of the
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Montreal
August 6, 1992

Video News Releases: Breaching the Covenant with Viewers

At the 1991 conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, a discussion of video news releases was joined by an unidentified member of the audience who challenged the prerogative of news directors to determine what goes in their newscasts.

> I think the essential consideration here is, do journalists deserve editorial control anymore? And do television stations deserve the right to editorially restrict access to information, as a licensed body. I don't think they have a good case, at the moment, for arguing that they're doing a better job of providing information in the public interest as compared to the VNR providers or the infomercial providers, because I think, if you look at the Knight-Ridder study even that shows that journalists are out of step with the public. They're too politically oriented, they, there's a lot of crap that goes on, in terms of dead babies in the Dempster Dumpster lead stories and stuff that don't mean anything, and that the kind of information -- light cellular phones -- are more important to a lot of people than a lot of stuff that's airing.[1]

This statement carried with it a number of assumptions, including the somewhat radical assumption that newscasts should be considered as no more than common carriers, available without restriction to commercial and government entities. Short of that, however, the statement was obviously founded on the belief that a newscast is a special kind of program that in some way belongs to its audience, that the producers of newscasts have a commonly understood obligation to their viewers to include news items that are "important" to the viewers and to exclude "crap," however that term might be defined in this context.

Boston television news producer Candy Altman's response to the speaker tacitly accepted these assumptions and added another, that the producers of newscasts have an obligation independently to confirm the truth of claims made within the newscast.

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[1] "Video News Releases and Infomercials: New Developments, Ethics and Market Values," panel session at AEJMC 73rd Annual Convention, August 7, 1991, Boston, MA. Recording #JM91011, ACTS, Ballwin, Missouri. Hereinafter cited as "AEJMC."

> ...people assume, I think, and maybe they don't think journalists are doing the greatest job in the world and maybe they think that sometimes they're biased, but I think that when people watch a newscast, they assume that you've checked out whether that's the lightest cellular phone before you say that it is, and that's where I think, you know, you can't take that part of the control away.

This paper will include considerations of the nature of video news releases and how they differ from what we commonly call news, whether there is an implied agreement ("covenant") between those who produce newscasts and those who view and hear them, and, if so, whether that covenant is breached by the use of video news releases in newscasts.

A video news release ("VNR") can take a number of forms. One is that of a "news package" in which the employee of a sponsoring company or of a public relations firm poses as a reporter[2] on film, videotape or a satellite transmission, "reporting" a story on behalf of a commercial or other organization. This kind of VNR is produced in the form of a complete news report and is intended for inclusion, "as is," in a newscast. A second form is the provision to the television station of the script, video with natural sound ("b-roll"), and interview segments[3] so that the station may "package" these materials with the voice and face of one of its own reporters, thus making the story appear to be produced by the station itself. Cohn describes a VNR as a press release in a form that is usable by television newscast producers.[4] In either case, the commercial sponsor usually benefits in an indirect way, through heightened awareness of the general topic of the VNR, through promotion of the point of view expressed by the script and/or the interviewees/speakers included in the materials, or through inclusion of the sponsor's name or logo in the script or in the video.

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[2] Gandy, Oscar H., *Beyond Agenda Setting: Information Subsidies and Public Policy* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1982) 69.

[3] Kaelble, Steve, "Video News Releases: How to get your company on the television news," *Indiana Business Magazine* June 1991: 55.

[4] Cohn, Fred, "PR Enters the Video Age: One Part News to Two Parts Promotion," *Corporate Video Decisions* Mar. 1989: 34.

A variant of the VNR is the "satellite interview tour," in which the sponsor makes a spokesman available via satellite for interviews by local television personnel.[5] Live audio and video of the interviewee is available to the station via satellite; audio of the interviewer's voice goes back to the interviewee by telephone line. This technique is different from the VNR, however, in that the VNR predetermines the content of the story, to some degree at least, whereas the local reporter participating in a satellite interview may direct it to any topic. Sponsorship manifests itself only in the appearance of the interviewee in the video, possibly with company logos or symbols in the picture, and in the fact that the sponsor pays the costs of satellite transmission (perhaps the "moral equivalent" of flying the interviewee to the city where the station is located, although usually less expensive).

Although the history of VNRs goes back to the 1950s, when New York publicist Don Phelan provided silent black-and-white film clips to television stations,[6] widespread production and distribution of them did not occur until the 1980s, particularly the latter half of that decade. More than four-thousand VNRs were made available to U.S. television stations in 1991, up from 700 in 1986.[7] During that period of time, production of VNRs grew from a cottage industry to a multi-million-dollar business[8] with hundreds of firms vying for the market.[9] VNRs had become so ubiquitous by 1992 that the Nielsen audience research company estimated 80 percent of news directors were using them several times a month.[10] In 1990, MediaLink, a company specializing in satellite distribution of VNRs, reported that more than 81 million television viewers saw footage from StarKist's "Dolphin-Safe Tuna" VNR.[11] The previous year, MediaLink's top-rated VNR, a story about Sears shutting down its stores for repricing of merchandise, was reported as reaching a mere 70.2 million viewers.[12] In 1991, VNRs of Iraqi troops in Kuwait and of a speech by a Kuwaiti woman at the United Nations, produced by Hill and Knowlton, the international public relations firm, were among the most widely used stories in American television news.[13] One producer of VNRs has estimated that 40 percent of the stations receiving a typical VNR use it intact and do not identify it as coming from a sponsored source.[14] Others, however, warn that usage reports provided by producers of VNRs are often exaggerated.[15] (In the liberal use of public relations "handouts," television was following in the footsteps of its respected print forebears. In 1979, a *Columbia Journalism Review* researcher found 45 percent of the news items in one issue of the *Wall Street Journal* to be verbatim or slightly rewritten press releases.)[16]

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[5] Albert, John J., "The World of Satellites: Your Global Voice," *Public Relations Quarterly* Spring 1987: 23.

[6] Kleinfield, N. R., "The Video News Release: Let the Viewer Beware," *The New York Times* 2 Jan. 1989: L33.

[7] Lieberman, David, "Fake News," *TV Guide* 22 Feb. 1992: 26.

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[8] Green, Richard, and Denise Shapiro, "A Video News Release Primer," *Public Relations Quarterly* Winter 1977-78: 10.

[9] Fifteen such firms were listed in a special pull-out section of *Inside PR* May, 1991: 19-22. Seventy-one firms were listed in *O'Dwyer's PR Services Report* Apr. 1991: 33-58.

[10] Lieberman 16.

[11] "Ad Notes," *The Wall Street Journal* 15 Aug. 1990: B6.

[12] Farnham, Alan, "Move Over, MTV...," *Fortune* 14 Aug. 1987: 14.

[13] McCauley, Kevin, H&K's PR drive for Kuwait shows clout of VNRs," *O'Dwyer's PR Services Report* Apr. 1991: 18.

[14] Kleinfield L33.

Among news directors and VNR producers alike, there is a general belief that stations in smaller markets, with fewer employees, use VNRs to a greater extent than those in large metropolitan markets, with sizeable news departments.[17] WCVB-TV executive producer Candy Altman used the 1991 AEJMC session to worry aloud about small-market vulnerability to VNRs.

> And I worry less about markets like Boston where there are larger staffs, and where there's less reliance on material provided by other sources than I do about smaller stations around the country who have much smaller staffs and who may need to fill their shows with medical reports that are from video news releases.[18]

In the same statement, however, Altman said that her station uses medical VNRs from time to time, "generally ... the ones that are provided by JAMA, which is the Journal of the American Medical Association."

News producers use VNRs for a variety of reasons, most having to do with resources, access, or convenience. Oscar Gandy, borrowing Randall Bartlett's concept,[19] refers to VNRs and other public relations functions involving the provision of information as "information subsidies" in which "the source of that information causes it to be made available at something less than the cost a user would face in the absence of the subsidy."[20] Journalists must produce "stories that will win publication" and therefore "will attend to, and make use of, subsidized information that is of a type and form that will achieve that goal."[21] The journalist receives the subsidy, the ability to use information (or video) without paying the cost of gathering it. In this instance the use of VNRs is interpreted simply as a matter of economics, particularly in a time of staff cutbacks.

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[15] Green 13. Also, in the AEJMC session, Klepper commented: "I really question some of the ballooned and inflated numbers. I think quite frankly we in the public relations profession, we tend to jump on trends and abuse them..."

[16] "It's in the Journal, but this is reporting?" *Columbia Journalism Review* Mar.-Apr. 1980: 34-36.

[17] Clark, Kenneth, "Medialink News Service Blurs Line Between News, Hype," *Chicago Tribune* 2 Jan. 1990.

[18] AEJMC.

> Given the present situation, in which on-air reporters have less time to report and there are fewer behind-the-scenes people to do the research, it is hardly surprising that a public relations executive, Jan Van Meter of Fleishman Hillard in New York, should say that he sees more and more local news being generated by p.r. firms. News conferences and press announcements become tempting subjects if you must fill up the same airtime but have fewer people to dig up real news. "They're all legitimate news stories," former WABC and WCBS producer Jim Murphy says of such items. "But, if you had your druthers, you wouldn't put them on television." Shorthanded news staffs, he says, "compromise because they have to. They've got to fill the two hours."[22]

Larry Pintak, former CBS News correspondent who went on to become a VNR producer, told David Lieberman that stations use VNRs because the news industry "has been so gutted over the last few years that they don't have a choice."[23]

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[19] Bartlett, Randall, *Economic Foundations of Political Power* (New York: The Free Press, 1973).

[20] Gandy 61.

[21] Gandy 62.

[22] Rosenau, Neal, "After the Cutbacks: What's the Damage to Local TV News?" *Columbia Journalism Review* Sep.-Oct. 1988: 48.

Even stations and networks with abundant budgets tend to use "handout video" of events or locations to which they otherwise do not have access.[24] In 1989, CBS News used a statement by Frederick H. Joseph, president of Drexel Burnham Lambert Inc., about that firm's settlement of federal securities-law violations, when Joseph was not available for interviews and the handout video was made available just an hour before airtime.[25] More dramatically, Hill and Knowlton's crew in Kuwait, given access to locations and material denied to the news media, provided footage of Iraqi military activities in Kuwait City and interviews with Kuwaiti women (who turned out to be relatives of high Kuwaiti officials).[26] This "coverage," produced by former CBS News producer Lew Allison and other former television journalism professionals, was widely used by networks and stations alike during the Persian Gulf conflict.

VNRs about medical subjects are particularly popular with stations,[27] as are economic stories.[28] Health news is relevant to all viewers, and with the demographics of the U.S. population shifting toward the mature end of the age scale, news of medical research and treatment is growing more popular. At the same time, announcements of new drugs and medical procedures are not easy for stations to cover. Most are not physically close to medical research centers, and even those that are, are usually prohibited from taking cameras into operating rooms and research laboratories. Additionally, "some vendors of prescription medicine are enjoined from television spot advertising, making relatively soft-sell video publicity the logical -- indeed the *only* -- avenue for getting the word out on TV."[29] Federal regulators became sufficiently concerned with these "new promotional techniques"[30] as a possible evasion of regulations governing advertising, that the Food and Drug Administration in 1991 began requiring pharmaceutical companies to submit VNRs for review,[31] an action protested by the Radio-Television News Directors Association as a violation of First Amendment rights.[32]

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[23] Lieberman 16.

[24] Cohn 35.

[25] Kleinfield L33.

[26] Strong, Morgan, "Portions of the Gulf War were brought to you by...the folks at Hill and Knowlton," *TV Guide* 22 Feb. 1992: 11-13. See also McCauley 18.

[27] Cohn, 35, quotes George Glazer of Hill and Knowlton: "We do an *awful* lot of medical stories."

[28] "Survey: demand high for VNRs about the economy," *Public Relations Journal* Aug. 1991: 10.

It is that blurring of the line between news and advertising that makes the video news release a viable form. For a VNR to be effective, it must have the look and feel of a legitimate news story. The promotion must be subtle.[33] The VNR must meet the needs of the local news organization and look like a story that might have been produced by that organization.[34] The producer of the VNR is cautioned not to make the technical quality of the report too much better than what might be expected from a local television newsroom, else it will look "overproduced" and will not be used.[35] Gandy notes that the "subsidy givers" in the information subsidy system "have an incentive to hide or disguise" the source of the information.[36] Jason Berger, a Duquesne University professor who was contracted to write a treatment for a VNR recalled that the producer pushed for similitude to news.

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[29] Cohn 35.

[30] Taylor, Steven T. and Morton Mintz, "A Word From Your Friendly Drug Co.," *The Nation* 21 Oct. 1991: 484.

[31] Rothenberg, Randall, "P.R. Images Spread, Via Satellite," *The New York Times* 9 Sep. 1991: D1.

[32] Lieberman 26.

[33] Kaelble 56.

> Michael kept on returning the drafts to me and said, "It's not news enough. It's not news enough. Get that news angle in. They're spending a lot of money. Make sure it's newsworthy."[37]

Michael Klepper, the man who commissioned Berger's work, agreed, defending his work as being that of a "journalism professional."

> I spent seven years at NBC as a writer, director, producer, and if I have any value to my clients, it's that what I bring to their table is my news instincts, my news judgment, my news sense. And I will not let them produce a commercial. If they want a commercial, let 'em go to Madison Avenue. There are a lot of wonderful firms that do a lot of beautiful work -- it's glitsy, jazzy and snappy, and it's beautiful -- but I won't do that. But what I will do is put together a story that I think has legitimate news.[38]

The ideal VNR, then, is a piece of promotion that looks like news, sounds like news, feels like news,[39] and even has legitimate news value -- the topic is one that could attract actual news coverage. In that regard, some public relations practitioners have suggested that VNRs are particularly useful to an organization in the throes of crisis management.[40] It has already been noted that new developments in health care and treatment are legitimate news of widespread interest. Government agencies, particularly those concerned with wildlife and the environment, also find their VNRs widely used, even redistributed by television stations.

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[34] Green 10.

[35] Horne, Grant N., "Making Video a Full Partner in PR," *Public Relations Quarterly* Summer 1986: 25.

[36] Gandy 61.

[37] AEJMC.

[38] AEJMC.

> Lydia Saldana with the Texas Deparatment of Parks and Wildlife regularly produces very fine packaged reports on environmental issues, which I use with regularity in v/o or vo-bite [voice-over-video or voice-over-video-leading-to-sound-bite] form. I also usually include these packages on the NBC Texas regional feed, which KMOL coordinates, and so in that capacity I practically act as an agent of the state in distributing these reports to NBC affiliates across Texas (the other two networks, I'm told, also distribute Lydia's reports from time to time on their regional feeds).[41]

In this case, the managing editor of a metropolitan television station finds legitimate news in a series of VNRs. An Indianapolis television station broadcast, intact, a Klepper-produced series of stories on research into communication disorders in children at a hospital operated by his client, Boys Town, a practice which Klepper and, apparently, the station found to be logical and legitimate. In fact, the station even went so far as to identify the VNR-supplied reporter as its own.[42] Herein lies the heart of the problem with the use of VNRs: deception.

Over the three to four decades that television news has existed, it has built a bond of trust between the newscast producer and the viewer. This understanding, or "news covenant," might be said to include these elements: the producer of the newscast pledges to monitor the events of the day, selecting the most important, relevant and interesting items for inclusion in the newscast, to gather information in a fair and objective way, to prepare reports that have substantial completeness,[43] and to report the news in a fair and unbiased manner. The producer also pledges to keep the news independent of commercial or government influence, even though it is usually surrounded by commercial or government announcements. In return, the viewer agrees to watch the newscast, to accept the news as credible and true (if subject to occasional inaccuracy), and to watch the commercials that accompany the news, thus allowing the station to be a viable business. Description of this "news covenant" could no doubt be expanded and qualified, as it has been in the form of codes of ethics, guidelines, and texts on ethics, but the essential ingredient for purposes of this discussion is that the producers of newscasts will maintain "a clear and distinct separation between broadcast content and commercial matter."[44] Inherent in this idea of separation is the notion that all of the audio and video elements in the news broadcast have either been originated by the newscast producer or have been verified as accurate and as being what they purport to be.

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[39] Carmody, Deirdre, "TIME's Blending Print with Video," *The New York Times* 4 Nov. 1991: C8.

[40] Albert 23.

[41] Carr, Forrest, electronic mail message, 10 Sep. 91. Carr was Managing Editor of KMOL-TV in San Antonio, Texas.

[42] Videotape of the series, as broadcast on the station, was shown at the AEJMC session.

It is argued that labeling VNRs effectively removes any deception that might exist and thus eliminates the ethical problem that is at the heart of this discussion. Certainly proper identification of a report or of video supplied by a sponsored source can clarify to the viewer that the producer of the newscast did not originate the material. However, problems exist: (1) producers may find complete labeling to be long and cumbersome in a fast-moving newscast, (2) some research indicates that labeling in the form of super-imposed letters on the screen is ineffective, *i.e.* not remembered by the audience, (3) television newscasts have a promotional aspect which tends to discourage identification of outside material, (4) indications are that, in practice, most VNR material is not labeled, and (5) the widespread practice of exchanging and redistributing video between stations and networks augurs that news producers will use VNR material without knowing they are using it. Let us take up these considerations one by one.

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[43] Klaidman, Stephen and Tom L. Beauchamp, *The Virtuous Journalist*, (New York: Oxford, 1987) 35.

[44] *CBS News Standards* (New York: CBS Inc., 1976), 2.

The most common way to label material in a television newscast is by superimposing words over the pictures on the screen. These are commonly known as "CGs" because they result from the use of an electronic Character Generator. "File Footage" is a common CG, as is the name of a reporter whose face is on the air. The size of the typical television screen and the fleeting nature of television news severely limits the amount of information that can be communicated by a CG: usually it is three or four words. How, then, can one accurately use a CG to tell the audience that the footage on the screen was supplied by Hill and Knowlton Public Relations on behalf of its client, Citizens for a Free Kuwait, an organization created by the Kuwaiti government-in-exile? Does one create a CG reading, "Kuwaiti footage," which is not precisely accurate, or "Video from Hill & Knowlton," which is incomprehensible to the vast majority of the audience who have never heard of the public relations firm? Proper labeling of the footage almost certainly requires that the reporter or anchor telling the story take the time to describe the source of the footage as part of the narration of the story. Such an identification interrupts the flow of the news story and distracts the viewer's attention from it.

Experimental research conducted by Cameron, Hanily and Hazinski at the University of Georgia indicates that the likelihood that a viewer will recall a label on a television story is no greater than chance.

> It may be important to disclose to viewers that the source of the news story was a VNR, both for the integrity of the news organization and the public relations profession. If this disclosure is a desirable practice, some means other than a superimposed visual label should be developed. Superimposed labels are not readily noted by viewers, resulting in limited effectiveness both as a source label and as a useful mention of the VNR sponsor.[45]

The study reported that CG identifications were least remembered when they appeared over footage of events, best remembered when they accompanied abstract news with less compelling video. In either event, CG identifications by their nature, appearing simultaneously with other, different, audio and video information, act as a distraction from the main story rather than as a part of the main story.

News producers may be discouraged from using effective means to label outside material because such labeling tends to undermine the long-term credibility of the newscast as a program that is independently produced.[46] News producers are motivated by promotional concerns in addition to their desire to provide information to the viewers. These promotional concerns are aimed at developing a kind of "brand loyalty" to their particular channel and newscast. Thus the packaging of the newscast, particularly the use of graphics but also the way news stories are built, is primarily promotional in nature. Some of the techniques include (1) developing a sense of credibility by having the viewer see the station's reporters in the acts of gathering and reporting the news, (2) developing familiarity with the station's reporters and anchors through frequent exposure of their faces, voices and names in close association with the station's call letters and/or advertising slogan (*e.g.* "Newschannel 8's John Carroll" in the introduction of the story, followed by a CG, "John Carroll/Newschannel 8"), and (3) exclusion of clues that the station's personnel did not gather or produce the news on the newscast (thus network affiliates tend to identify network correspondents as their own -- "Newschannel 8's Bob Simon in Baghdad" -- rather than as employees of an outside agency, such as the network). The promotional motivations behind these and other techniques have a tendency to discourage labeling of material in the newscast as having come from a commercial or government sponsor, particularly detailed labeling within the narration of the story.

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[45] Cameron, Glen T., Mary Lynn Hanily and David Hazinski, "If You Knew What I Knew: Effect of Source Labeling on the Processing of VNRs," paper presented to the Public Relations Interest Group at the convention of the International Communication Association, Chicago, 1991.

[46] Cameron 16; Lieberman 26.

Indeed, those surveys that are available indicate that relatively few stations label outside material that appears within their newscasts.[47] One reason may be that, as Cameron observes, the re-writing and editing of script and video footage supplied by a sponsor allow it to be "claimed by a station as its own. The TV news department, adopting the role of media gatekeeper, takes responsibility for the story."[48] (Such a practice can be dangerous: although the news department may take responsibility for the story, it may be unable to verify its accuracy.)[49]

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[47] Robins, J. Max, "Ready-Made News," *Channels* Feb. 1990: 26. See also Kleinfield 33, Lieberman 16

[48] Cameron 2.

Another may be that, when bits and pieces of VNR video are used, the news director may be unaware that the newscast contains such material.[50] Stories containing unlabeled VNR material are undoubtedly among the hundreds of stories that are exchanged daily between stations, both directly and through regional and national satellite exchanges.[51] Because stories are normally exchanged without CGs, in order that the receiving station may use CGs of its own font and style, VNR material that is labeled in the newscast of the originating station may be unlabeled by numerous receiving stations because they might be unaware of its presence in the story.

To the degree that VNRs are used without clear identification, that use is a breach of the covenant between news producers and news audiences that the news will be independently gathered and produced. Such a practice amounts to abrogation of responsibility on the part of news producers, "selling the credibility they spent 30 years building up."[52]

Indeed, widespread use of outside material, whether from commercial and government sponsors or from individuals and politically interested groups, even when properly labeled, could eventually alter the covenant, so that the audience might no longer expect the newscast to be the product of its independent producers but simply a collection of stories, pictures, pitches and videos from a multiplicity of sources. The rapid proliferation of personal video cameras, networked computers, fax machines and other telecommunications equipment has prompted John Maxwell Hamilton to predict that traditional, professional news producers will find that they are only a few of many voices "giving the news."

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[49] Altman, AEJMC: "There was a situation where there was a story on crack babies, a medical video news release, and there was a waiting room filled with women and babies, and they were talking about crack babies. Now, we have no idea where that video came from. We have no idea whether those women are really women who have given birth to crack babies."

[50] Clark 2.

[51] Carr; Lieberman 26.

[52] David Hazinski, quoted in Lieberman 26.

> Journalists won't disappear any more than newspapers, radio and television will disappear. But they don't have their old lock on the profession either. The lines between news gatherer and audience are blurring. Journalists increasingly use databases put out by non-journalists. News audiences increasingly become part of the communications process, requesting information tailored to their needs and sending information they have gathered.[53]

These trends extend beyond the purview of this discussion, but they deserve considerable study. Additional research is also needed, building on the work of Cameron *et. al.*, to delineate what might be an effective way of labeling outside video and other materials in newscasts. It would also be desirable to explore ways of keeping such labels with those materials as they move from station to station.

Over the four decades of television news, an understanding, or covenant, has been built between news producers and news audiences, that includes the idea that a clear separation will be maintained between advertising and promotion on the one hand, and news content on the other. Video news releases by their nature are commercials and promotions disguised as news and intended for use as part of news content. They are therefore intrinsically deceptive: sponsored messages trading on the credibility of news that has been made credible by its traditional independence from sponsorship.

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[53] Hamilton, John Maxwell, "Areopagitica Redux: In Defense of Electronic Liberties," *Media Studies Journal* 5:4 (Fall 1991), 45-46.

VNRs have become widely used in recent years because of shrinking resources, lack of access to newsworthy events and locations, and simple convenience. Although labeling of VNR material is widely believed to obviate ethical problems with its use, producers may find complete labeling to be lengthy and cumbersome, some research indicates that labels superimposed on the television screen are ineffective, and the promotional aspects of commercial television news discourage the labeling of outside material. Data available indicate that most uses of VNRs are not labeled, and exchange and redistribution of news stories make labeling even more unlikely.

Growing use of VNRs and other outside materials by news producers can lead to erosion or alteration of the news covenant, and thus alteration of the common understanding of the term "news" at a time when television is regarded as the dominant news medium.[54] To the degree that this erosion of the news covenant occurs, and the audience comes to think of the newscast as a kind of common carrier or bulletin board for use by individuals and groups with special interests, news directors will have lost their prerogative to determine what goes into their newscasts, not by sending reporters to do stories about dead babies in the Dempster Dumpster but by laying off reporters and instead airing "free" stories about cellular telephones and other products.

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[54] Horne 23. See also Shell, Adam, "Reaching Out to the TV Generation," *Public Relations Journal* Nov. 1990: 29.

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Filling the gap:
Congress increases its video
as TV news cuts budgets

A paper for the Radio-TV Journalism Division
Association for Education in Journalism
and Mass Communication
1992 Convention

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Filling the gap: Congress increases its video as TV news cuts budgets

The power of television to dominate political events, and in turn to be manipulated by skillful media managers, has been well documented.[1] The primary emphasis has been on the presidency, which since Dwight Eisenhower's carefully-orchestrated television effort of 1952 has not been attained without the mastery of visual imagery.[2] The influential role played by campaign advertising--the techniques of which are carried into office along with media advisors from the campaign--were described by McGinnis and more recently by Jamieson.[3]

The combined effects of public relations, advertising, computerized polling and campaign consultants are increasingly central to the exercise of power as well as the winning of elections. And in all cases, television is increasingly the dominant factor. In the case of Congress, this influence has been recognized by the expansion of increasingly-sophisticated broadcast studios on Capitol Hill, aimed at allowing members of Congress to maintain a district presence while they perform their duties in Washington.

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[1] Doriș Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics, 3d ed* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1989); Hedrick Smith, *The power game: How Washington works* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988); Mark Hertsgaard, *On bended knee: The press and the Reagan presidency* (New York: Schoken Books, 1988); Dean Alger, Television, perceptions of reality and the presidential election of '84, *PS* 20: 49-57 (Winter 1987); Martin Schram, *The great American video game: Presidential politics in the television age* (New York: William Morrow, 1987).

[2] For a discussion of the Eisenhower effort, see Steve Barkin, Eisenhower's planning board: An unwritten chapter in the history of political broadcasting. *Journal of Broadcasting* 27:319-331 (Fall 1983). For a general discussion, see John Tebbel and Sarah Miles Watts, *The press and the presidency: From George Washington to Ronald Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Books, 1985).

[3] Joe McGinnis, *The selling of the president, 1968* (New York: Pocket Books, 1969); Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Packaging the presidency: A history and criticism of presidential campaign advertising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

Congress as an institution has always trailed the White House in its use of sophisticated new technology. Although individual members were active in using the electronic media, a tax-supported broadcast studio was established only in 1935, well after President Franklin D. Roosevelt began his "fireside chats." Congress added film facilities to its radio studios in 1952 and members began producing film, and later tape, reports for local media.[4]

Congressional incumbents who are seen regularly on television can enter a campaign with very high name recognition. In their studies of 1984 and 1986 congressional races, Goldenberg and Traugott found incumbents in Michigan entered campaigns with 85% recognition by voters, and the campaigns increased that recognition only to 88%.[5] It is the work done between elections, then, that establishes an incumbent's advantage in name recognition.

Increasingly during the 1980s, members of Congress added video news releases, transmitted by satellite, to their established use of radio actualities and print news releases.[6] The use of electronic media paralleled an increase in use of professional campaign consultants by House candidates, a trend that may be expected to accelerate with the uncertain politics of new 1992 congressional districts. Redistricting shuffled the electoral deck, matching old politicians with new voters, and the necessity of a quick introduction meant extensive use of electronic media.

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[4] E.W. Chester, *Radio, television, and American politics* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1969).

[5] E.N. Goldenberg and M. Traugott, Mass media in U.S. Congressional elections, *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 12:317-340 (August 1987).

[6] R.E. Dewhirst, *Patterns of interaction between members of the U.S. House of Representatives and their home district news media.* Unpublished PhD

Changes in coverage priorities of television stations are also a factor in media planning by members of Congress. The buildup during the 1980s of Washington television bureaus serving local stations levelled off by 1990, and several bureaus closed or reduced staff as the decade opened. All forms of media are reducing coverage of government in the face of budget cuts and turned-off viewers and readers.[7] As stations reduce political coverage, reporters specializing in the field will be scarce, leaving more decisions in the hands of producers with limited background and experience in political news. Thus video news releases by members of Congress will reach local television stations that devote less time and budget to developing their own political coverage, and place more emphasis on packaging.

Electronic communication--video news releases, conferencing by satellite, and even an increase in the use of video cameras--may

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dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1983; Ann Haskell, Live from Capitol Hill: Where politicians use high tech to bypass the press, *Washington Journalism Review* 4:14:48-50 (November, 1982).

[7] Carl Sessions Stepp, Of the people, by the people, bore the people, *Washington Journalism Review* 14: 61-64 (March 1992); Neil Koch, Television turns its back on the statehouse, *Channels* 12:12 (April, 1989); Stephen Hess, *Live from Capitol Hill: Studies of Congress and the media* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1991).

be expected in the remainder of the decade as new members arrive in Congress, media-saavy and familiar with local television markets.

This study explores Congressional use of electronic media in a two-year period, 1988 and 1989, a time in which Congress was moving toward the redistricting changes of the 1990 decennial census, and also a time in which television stations in local districts were already beginning to reduce budgets and, in many cases, reduce coverage of politics and government. This period, then, is a particularly good time to look for the types of electronic media explored by a Congress in transition. In addition to the types of media, this study also sought data related to the type of representative most attuned to heavy use of electronic media. This should allow us to project some images of congressional media use during the remainder of the decade.

Research questions included: What forms of electronic media were most used in 1988 and 1989? Who used these devices, and how frequently? Are there linkages between the coverage pattern of local television stations and use of electronic media on Capitol Hill?

Method

A questionnaire was circulated to press contacts for 430 members of the U.S. House of Representatives (five offices were vacant in January, 1990, or had been filled by special election within the past few months), asking for data on their use of electronic media during 1988 and 1989. The return rate was 51%, evenly distributed by party and other characteristics.[8]

Frequency of use was requested for satellite transmission of news releases, satellite conferencing, and use of satellite transmission to deliver remarks to district meetings. Also requested was the frequency with which members produced cable programs or material to be inserted into local cable programming.

To probe for relationships between local TV news coverage and use of electronic media by Congress, the survey asked representatives for the identity of Capitol Hill television news bureaus serving stations in their district, and to estimate how frequently the representative appeared in news bureau reports.

Members were identified by seniority, political party, and the relative political safety of their legislative district, in order to determine characteristics of members making the heaviest use of electronic media.

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[8] This rate of return may be considered above average for a survey of active politicians at this level. Anne Haskell's (*op cit*) 1982 survey of Congressional media patterns produced a 22% rate. A 43% rate of return was reported on a survey of Congressional candidates, by Ruth Ann Weaver-Lariscy and Spencer F. Tinkham (News coverage, endorsements and personal campaigning: The influence of non-paid activities in Congressional elections, *Journalism Quarterly* 68:432-444, Fall 1991).

Findings

Video news releases transmitted by satellite are a growing factor in local television news, and Congress has picked up on this opportunity, as seen in Table 1. While nearly 63% of members reported some use of satellites to transmit VNRs in 1989, the more remarkable finding is the increase in heavy use of this form of news release. Some 39 House offices, or 18% of those responding, reported sending more than a dozen video news releases via satellite in 1989, an average of at least one transmission per month. The mean use of satellite for news in 1989 was 6.1 transmissions per member, an increase of 33% over the 1988 mean of 4.6 transmissions.

Of particular interest with the new district boundaries created by the decennial census, is the relationship between political security and use of satellites. Members of Congress elected under new district alignments may be expected to feel less secure as they encounter new voters. This study indicates they will increase their use of video news releases and other forms of electronic media as a result. Table 2 discusses the relationship between political security and use of satellites to deliver video news releases. For this survey, districts were termed "safe" if the incumbent had consistently won general elections by 65% or more of the vote and the presidential candidate of his or her party carried the district in at least one of the last three elections.[9] By this measure, 69% of districts were termed "safe"; other districts were termed "marginal".

Members representing districts termed "marginal" were more likely to send news releases by satellite than those termed "safe," and in terms of heavy use, 38% of "marginal" districts, compared to 26% of "safe" districts, used satellite news feeds six times or more in 1989.

The 1990 decennial census resulted in major shifts in district boundaries, creating--at least temporarily--"marginal" districts across the nation, as members adjusted to new realities. Until this adjustment is complete, members may be expected to consider themselves "marginal" in terms of political security, and resort to heavier use of video news releases and other electronic media.

Seniority in Congress was also a factor in the use of satellite transmission. Senior members of Congress, those elected prior to 1973, made significantly less use of satellites to send material to local stations than did congressmen of medium seniority (elected 1974-1982) or those elected since 1983. (Table 3)

Party affiliation is also a factor, with Republicans making greater use of electronic media, particularly the satellite news release (Table 4). Republican caucuses on Capitol Hill were the first to move heavily into electronic media, beginning with the Senate Republican Conference in the 1970s. It must be noted, however, that Republicans are more likely to represent districts with suburban, small city and rural constituencies, where the smaller television stations may be more inclined to accept video news releases than their counterparts in large-market urban areas, typically represented by Democrats.

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[9] Data on election margins and congressional districts was taken from Michael Barone and Grant Ujifusa, *The almanac of American politics 1990* (Washington: National Journal, 1989).

Video news releases are the outlet of choice, but members are increasingly using satellites for other purposes, as illustrated in Tables 5 and 6. Satellites were used for conferencing by 29% of those responding for 1989, and were used to deliver remarks to district meetings by 14% of those responding.

The inclination to use video news releases and other forms of electronic communication--some bypassing media entirely--will be encouraged by changes in the nature of political news coverage in the 1990s, particularly in television news. The decade began with cutbacks in television news budgets at network and local levels, accompanied by a lower priority for political coverage.

One of the areas of television coverage most affected by this change was the Capitol Hill news bureau. Washington bureaus blossomed in the 1980s; typically, a regional television company would establish a two to five-person bureau, serving all of the company's stations, or smaller stations would hire stringers based in a Washington free-lance operation. Large national companies such as Gannett and Cox also bolstered their bureaus in the 1980s. By 1990, however, cutbacks were evident in the wake of news budget cuts, and the impact was particularly acute among regional bureaus. Several closed or severely limited coverage in 1989 and 1990.[10]

The presence of Washington-based television news bureaus serving stations in a member's district was a significant factor in the exposure a member received in Washington-originated coverage in 1988 and 1989. Appearances of at least two or three times a month were reported by 54% of members served by three or more bureaus, and 11% appeared at least weekly. (See Table 7).

The type of bureau was also significant, as we see in Table 8, with heavier appearance rates on regional bureaus, which are better able to localize their coverage of Washington.[11] Among representatives served predominantly by regional bureaus, 82% reported appearing in bureau reports at least two or three times a month in 1989, a much higher rate than for members served by other types of bureaus. Nearly 18% of representatives covered by regional bureaus reported appearing at least weekly in bureau reports.

Cutbacks in Washington bureaus force members of Congress to search for new outlets. Cable is particularly attractive as hookups continue to increase. Production of cable interview or magazine shows increased from 31% of those responding indicating use of this type of program in 1988, to 43% in 1989. Production of material to be inserted into local cable programming also increased, from 15% of respondents in 1988 to 28% in 1989. (Tables 9 and 10)

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[10] Bureau closures or severe cutbacks affected stations in the following markets during the period surveyed: Minneapolis-St. Paul, Omaha, Providence, Columbus, Wichita, Charlotte and Richmond.

[11] Regional bureaus were defined as serving smaller television station groups with regional bases; national bureaus were defined as larger group owners with stations in more than one geographic region; and independent bureaus were defined as having no permanent affiliations, serving stations on a day-by-day, free-lance basis.

Congress is making heavy use of a cable outlet that came into being to televise Congressional debate, and has since expanded into a variety of public affairs programming, including the national political campaigns. For political affectionados, C-SPAN is regular viewing.

Representatives were asked "Is C-SPAN part of your media strategy? Fifty-two percent said it was a factor. The most frequent use of C-SPAN is the delivery of remarks from the House floor, either during debate or in the special-orders period after the day's session. Press contacts typically alert television news directors in their district, and news producers monitor C-SPAN and record the remarks.

Discussion

Although the video news release, delivered by satellite, is clearly the choice for maintaining visability in the district, members show considerable flexibility as they search for ways to use newer forms of electronic media.

In their search for new methods to reach constituents, members sometimes bypass the traditional broadcast newscast entirely. Conferencing and delivery of remarks by satellite may be expected to increase in the 1990s, as interest groups increasingly turn to this type of communication when congressional representatives cannot be present in person. With Congress placing limits on paid honoraria for speeches to interest groups, the use of satellite speeches or conferences may increase; without the incentive of an honorarium, a member may prefer to walk into a Capitol Hill studio for an electronic conversation with an interest group or corporate meeting or convention. Although these groups are different sorts of constituents than those made up solely of voters within the member's district, they are important as members search for campaign support and assistance in passing legislation.

The substantial increase in use of satellite for these purposes must be viewed with caution, as only a minority of members (29.4% for conferencing and 14.2% for remarks to meetings) were using satellite for these purposes in 1989. But the use is clearly increasing, and will be an area for further study in the 1990s. Also an area for the future is the use of camcorders, as this equipment becomes even more "user friendly" and is capable of producing broadcast-quality material. One can envision the use of camcorders to produce video souvenirs or Christmas cards for important constituents, or to deliver brief greetings to groups.

But the major action in the 1990s is the use of satellite transmission to deliver video news releases or to respond to requests from local television stations for comments. The high percentage of members already using video news releases may be expected to increase as the newly elected representatives from the redistricting scramble of 1992 transfer their campaign techniques to the capital. The new members were likely to be elected in a difficult campaign, possibly orchestrated by a media consultant. The image merchants in American campaigns work for, and are loyal to, a candidate. And the loyalty works both ways. "Elected officials are accountable to the voters and loyal to their consultants," observes political scientist

Larry Sabato, "They no longer have any reason to be loyal to the parties."[12] One result of this is a continuing relationship between consultant and elected official. The consulting often continues after the victory party, and includes polling on important issues and advice on legislative strategy, including the use of media. That strategy may be increasingly geared to production of video for district consumption.

Jay Blumler's concerns that policy decisions are increasingly influenced by how they will play in the arena of media-filtered mass perceptions, and that political personalization advances primarily because it is easier to project than issues, are concerns that must be considered as Congress explores multiple ways to build video images both through and outside the broadcast media.[13]

The willingness to try new forms of electronic media is axiomatic to a basic rule of political consultants: Use what works. For many respondents, the first choice is clearly satellite news releases, because of their ability to reach large district audiences and the credibility of appearing on local news programs.

Satellite feeds are not always used unedited, but they are easily inserted into locally produced stories or run as reactions to network stories. To some degree this allows the House to offset the natural media advantages of the White House and Senate.[14] For many members of Congress, the video news release is a natural reaction to the loss of coverage by Capitol Hill news bureaus serving district stations.

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[12] Quoted in R. Suskind, The power of political consultants, *New York Times Magazine*, August. 12, 1984:62.

[13] Jay C. Blumler, Elections, the media and the modern publicity process, in Marjorie Ferguson (ed), *Public communication: The new imperatives* (London: Sage, 1990): 101-113.

[14] Lynda Lee Kaid and Joe Foote, How network television coverage of the president and Congress compare, *Journalism Quarterly* 62:59-65 (Spring 1985);

Washington-based broadcast news bureaus proliferated in the 1980s, but by the end of the decade were feeling the pinch of economic decisions by local stations, and several regional bureaus closed or sharply reduced operations in 1989 and 1990. For surviving Washington bureaus, coverage is shifting from Congress to more national events and personalities. Local stations are assigning bureaus to cover a summit meeting, Washington's drug troubles or features that in the past would have been rejected in favor of Congressional coverage featuring the local delegation. Records of the Radio-Television Correspondents' Gallery indicate that at many Senate hearings (records are not kept for House hearings) the majority of television cameras represent cable (C-SPAN or CNN), foreign crews (primarily Japanese and German), and crews working directly for senators through the party television studios.[15]

Part of the reason is local TV's emphasis on breaking news and events that provide colorful footage; Congress is seen as a "talking head" and government coverage in general is in decline. Stephen Hess surveyed the local newscasts of 57 stations in 35 cities from September, 1987 to April, 1988. The markets ranged in size from Los Angeles (2nd) to Grand Junction, Colorado (186th). In the

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Alan P. Balutis, Congress, the president and the press, *Journalism Quarterly* 53:509-515 (Fall 1976).

[15] U.S. Congress, *Summary of broadcast coverage of Senate activities for the month of February, 1990.* (Senate Radio-Television Correspondents Gallery, March 16, 1990).

newscasts he monitored, there was little political or governmental news of any sort. Only 13 House members made the local news in their home districts while Hess was watching, and eight of those stories were locally produced.[16]

Success rates for congressional video news releases is largely anecdotal, although it is relatively easy for a member to monitor local television and determine use patterns. Acceptance of video news releases varies greatly from station to station, but budget cuts in local TV news have caused news producers to reach for material that was rejected in the 1980s.[17]

In urban markets, where many large stations won't accept video news releases from members of Congress, representatives are showing a greater interest in cable. Urban areas appear to be better suited for cable programming, and representatives are showing a renewed interest in cable. The hookup rate in many urban districts is approaching 75%, and cable lends itself to targeting by ethnic, economic, age or special interests. Congress has been producing cable programs for several years, but survey respondents indicate their interest has been renewed by evidence of higher viewership of cable.

Additional interest will be shown as more cable operations originate local news programs. It is simply part of the flexibility that saavy politicians and their media consultants must have to survive in the changing television landscape of the 1990s.

The trend away from coverage of government and politics means news departments are less likely to have a reporter specializing in politics than was the case in the 1970s and 1980s. The video news release, whether delivered directly by satellite or "sanitized" by C-SPAN cameras, allows a non-specialist producer to easily assemble a "reaction" piece which can be run as part of a network report or following such a report. The cost is a fraction of that required to support a political reporter and camera crew, yet the station has "covered" the issue.

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[16] Stephen Hess, *op. cit.*
[17] David Lieberman, Fake news, *TV Guide* (February 20, 1992): 10-16, 26.

Power in this situation shifts, then, from the journalist on the scene in Washington or the state capitol, to the news producer, who may have a different set of priorities based on visual appeal and economy of time. To the degree that politics is squeezed from local newscasts by budget reductions and/or ratings pressure, the judgment of production gatekeepers replaces that of field reporters and decisions are made in much the same manner as they are made by campaign consultants. One need only substitute "ratings" for "victory," and the parallel is complete.

The values of the news producer and the professional media consultant drive both toward the politics of image and away from the politics of policy. To the extent that those who manage images--in a news room or a political campaign--gain control of the political product, the electorate looking for greater substance will increasingly come up short.

Table 1

Frequency of satellite news feeds

Frequency	1988	%	1989	%	Change in %
None	76	47.5%	78	37.7%	-20.6%
1-5 feeds	45	28.1%	67	32.3%	14.9%
6-plus	39	24.0%	62	30.0%	25.0%
	N=160	100%	N=207	100%	

Statistics	1988	1989	Change
Mean use	4.581	6.072	32.5%

Table 2

Frequency of satellite conferencing

Frequency	1988	%	1989	%	Change in %
None	131	82.9%	139	70.6%	-14.8%
One	14	8.9%	35	17.7%	98.9%
2-plus	13	8.2%	23	11.7%	42.7%
	N=158	100%	N=197	100%	

Statistics	1988	1989	Change
Mean use	.411	.629	53.0%

Table 3

Frequency of satellite used to deliver remarks

Frequency	1988	%	1989	%	Change in %
None	142	92.2%	163	85.8%	6.9%
One	5	3.2%	12	6.3%	96.7%
2-plus	7	4.5%	15	7.9%	75.6%
	N=154	100%	N=190	100%	

Statistics	1988	1989	Change
Mean use	.623	.937	50.4%

Table 4

Frequency of satellite news feeds in 1989
by political security

Frequency	Safe	Marginal
No use	60 41.7%	18 28.6%
1-5	46 31.9%	21 33.3%
6-plus	38 26.4%	24 38.1%
Total	144	63

Table 5

Frequency of satellite news feeds, 1989
by seniority of members*

Frequency	Junior	Medium	Senior	Total
None sent	19	42	17	78
	31.7%	35.0%	45.9%	37.6%
1-5 sent	19	40	8	67
	31.7%	33.3%	21.7%	32.4%
6-plus sent	22	38	2	62
	36.6%	31.7%	5.4%	30.0%
Total	60	120	37	207
	100%	100%	100%	100%

*Junior: Elected since 1983; Medium: Elected 1973-1983; Senior: Elected prior to 1973.

Table 6

Frequency of satellite news feeds in 1989
by political affiliation

Frequency	Republican	Democrat	Total
No use	27	51	78
	32.1%	49.6%	37.7%
1-5	21	46	67
	25.0%	37.4%	32.4%
6-plus	36	26	62
	42.9%	21.1%	29.9%
	N=84	N=123	

Table 7

Appearance rate of members of Congress,
by number of TV news bureaus serving district .

	Number of Bureaus		
Appearance	None	1-2 Bureaus	3-Plus
Never	13	3	-0-
	29.5%	4.1%	0%
Rarely	21	27	15
	47.7%	36.5%	21.4%
Monthly	3	22	17
	6.8%	29.7%	24.3%
2-3 Per Month	6	14	30
	13.6%	18.9%	42.9%
Weekly	1	8	8
	2.2%	10.8%	11.4%
	100%	100%	100%

Table 8

Appearance rate of members of Congress,
by type of TV news bureau(s) serving district .

	Type of Bureau				
Appearance	None	Independent	National	Regional	Total
Never	13	1	2	1	17
	35.1%	2.5%	3.2%	2.6%	9.6%
Rarely	15	16	17	6	54
	40.5%	40.0%	27.4%	15.4%	30.3%
2-3 Month	8	21	37	25	91
	21.6%	52.5%	59.7%	64.1%	51.1%
Weekly	1	2	6	7	16
	2.7%	5.0%	9.7%	17.9%	9.0%
Total	37	40	62	39	178

Table 9

Frequency of cable magazine programs produced in 1988 and 1989

Frequency	1988	1989	Change in %
None	114	119	
	68.7%	57.8%	-15.9%
1-2	22	41	
	13.2%	19.9%	50.1%
3-plus	30	46	
	18.1%	22.3%	23.2%
	N=166	N=206	

Statistics	1988	1989	Change
Mean use	2.012	2.607	29.6%

Table 10

Frequency of material produced for local cable programming in 1988 and 1989

Frequency	1988	1989	Change in %
None	129	137	
	84.3%	71.4%	-15.3%
1-2	12	37	147.4%
	7.8%	19.3%	
3-plus	12	31	
	7.0%	9.0%	28.6%
	N=153	N=192	

Statistics	1988	1989	Change
Mean use	.608	.969	59.4%

THE CEREMONIAL OF TELEVISION NEWS SWEEPS: "SERIES SLEAZE" AND "SERIES STRESS"

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Paper for presentation to the Radio-Television Journalism Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Montreal, Canada, August 1992.

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Accepted for presentation to the
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AEJMC annual convention, Montreal, August 1992

Short Abstract

This paper adopts a cultural studies approach in arguing that local television news ratings periods constitute a ceremonial offering the possibility for both creativity and constraint. "Series sleaze" (the practice of airing sensational news series to boost ratings during sweeps) is compared with "series stress" (the pressure that reporters experience as they try to produce sweeps series) to demonstrate how sweeps can engender creativity and yet ultimately constrain that creativity.

THE CEREMONIAL OF TELEVISION NEWS SWEEPS: "SERIES SLEAZE" AND "SERIES STRESS"

Long Abstract

"Sweeps," the periods in which audiences are measured and advertising rates are set for television stations nationwide, are also periods in which many local television news organizations come under intense criticism for airing lurid and sensational news series to try to boost ratings. However, other news organizations produce "sweeps series" that often treat substantive issues in more depth than usual.

This paper adopts a cultural studies approach in viewing sweeps as a ceremonial that produces sometimes contradictory social consequences. Two of those consequences are "series sleaze" (sensationalistic reports) and "series stress" (the pressure placed upon newsworkers as they attempt to produce sweeps series). The manner in which "series sleaze" and "series stress" are enacted indicates that while sweeps do produce opportunities for creativity in television news, such creativity is typically constrained by industry norms that favor the professional and societal status quo.

THE CEREMONIAL OF TELEVISION NEWS SWEEPS: "SERIES SLEAZE" AND "SERIES STRESS"

A. Introduction

One of the more controversial aspects of local television news in the United States is the sweeps--the ratings periods in which audiences are measured and advertising rates are determined for stations across the country. News organizations regularly are lambasted and derided for airing multi-segment special reports--so-called "sweeps series"--that highlight sensational and lurid topics to try to lure extra viewers, topics including prostitution, satanism, and in one notorious recent example in Denver, dogfights staged for the camera (see Carman, 1985; Spiller, 1985; Brooke, 1986; Gritten, 1987; Moritz, 1989; O'Brien, 1991; Prendergast, 1991).

Despite all the negative attention from television critics in newspapers and trade publications, television news sweeps have received relatively scant attention from media scholars. Only Moritz (1989) appears to have focused directly on the subject, arguing that while the process by which sweeps series are produced "is a complex one that can operate differently in different circumstances," generally "promotion value outweighs news value" in sweeps series, and sweeps "reveal television news in its worst light" (p. 133).

What follows is not intended as a repudiation of such arguments; indeed, as I will discuss, sweeps quite often bring out the sleazier side of broadcast news. However, I will also suggest that sweeps offer an opportunity for news organizations to be creative--they can employ the multi-segment format to examine substantive issues in more depth than they ordinarily do. And reporters potentially can use the series to enhance their own journalistic credentials. Still, reporters tend to experience considerable stress as they challenge ordinary newsgathering norms and routines in attempting to produce more creative material. And, typically, those same norms and routines ultimately constrain newsworkers' attempts at creativity (Ettema & Whitney, 1982), thereby preserving both the professional status quo (in that journalistic norms remain unchanged) and the societal status quo (in that legitimated institutions and values are rarely challenged).

In short, I will argue that we can view television news sweeps as a ceremonial that produces multiple and sometimes seemingly contradictory social consequences. That is, I will examine sweeps from the perspective offered by cultural studies, drawing both from sociological studies of the mass media (Ettema, Whitney, & Wacker, 1987; Schudson, 1989) and from cultural analyses of organizations (Morgan, 1986, chap. 5). This kind of research seeks to understand how organizations--and social reality in general--are socially constructed and sustained through cultural expressions like "slogans, evocative language, symbols, stories, myths, ceremonies, rituals, and patterns of tribal behavior" (Morgan, 1986, p. 133).

From this perspective, I will view sweeps as a cultural

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expression producing consequences for individual newsworkers, their organizations, and the larger culture of which they are a part. Two social consequences produced by sweeps are "series sleaze" (lurid and sensationalistic news series) and "series stress" (the stress newsworkers and organizations experience as they attempt to produce sweeps series). I will compare "series sleaze" with "series stress" in arguing that sweeps series are more than a simple, cynical ploy to entice viewers. They are the result of a complex social practice that engenders both creativity and constraint, and both conflict and integration.

B. Sweeps as Ceremonial

I borrow the concept of "ceremonial" from the organizational culture literature, specifically the work of Harrison Trice and Janice Beyer (Trice & Beyer, 1984; Trice, 1985; Beyer & Trice, 1988). Trice and Beyer (1984, p. 655) define a ceremonial as "a system of several rites connected with a single occasion or event," with rite defined more narrowly as "relatively elaborate and planned sets of activities, carried out through social interaction, usually for the benefit of an audience, with multiple social consequences." They discuss six basic kinds of organizational rites: rites of passage (for example, Army basic training), rites of degradation (e.g., firing a chief executive), rites of enhancement (e.g., awards ceremonies), rites of renewal (e.g., organizational development activities), rites of conflict reduction (e.g., collective bargaining), and rites of integration

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(e.g., office Christmas parties).

Although Trice and Beyer generally limit their examination of rite and ceremonial to the organizational level of analysis, it seems fair to argue that the social consequences of ceremonials can extend to the occupational and institutional levels of analysis as well (Hirsch, 1977). That is, rites and ceremonials within news organizations have consequences not only for those organizations, but also for individual newsworkers and for the broader culture in which news organizations exist. Trice (1985, pp. 257) himself says that ceremonials "have been relied upon to legitimate entire social systems." And he continues:

> People need to understand their world and their place in it in order to be able to act within that world. Rites and ceremonials are important because they are potentially powerful sense-making practices that help to communicate and express, in a dramatic way, those ongoing understandings of a capricious, uncertain world. (p. 258)

In this way, we can view television news sweeps as a ceremonial consisting of a system of rites taking place within news organizations and producing, in its own way, far-ranging social consequences--the maintenance of professional norms within the television news industry, the enhancement or diminishment of individual newsworkers' careers, and as I will argue later, the legitimation of the societal status quo.

A few words of background on sweeps are in order here. Sweeps periods measure audiences for television stations nationwide. They are each four weeks long. In most markets, they occur four times a year, in February, May, July, and November (the July sweeps generally are deemed to be less important than the other three, because fewer people are watching television then). While the ratings periods are not the sole determinant of a station's advertising rates, stations still place an enormous emphasis on sweeps; the ratings periods constitute the primary method of tracking demographic trends in the audience, information that is of great interest to advertisers in deciding where to buy spots. So sweeps play a vitally important role in determining just how much money a given station can make. In top-twenty markets, as of 1989, the difference of a single ratings point during the sweeps could add up to $800 thousand a year (Moritz, 1989, p. 127).

Consequently, network affiliates typically have pressured networks for blockbuster programs during the sweeps, and have aired special programs, like news series, of their own (Beville, 1986). The production of these "sweeps series" meets the definition of ceremonial that we have outlined, in that the planning, production, and airing of the series can be seen as a system of rites connected to a larger event. We already have reviewed Trice's and Beyer's (1984, pp. 656-663) description of the types of "rites" that can be found within an organization: rites of passage, rites of degradation, rites of enhancement, rites of renewal, rites of conflict reduction, and rites of integration. Examples of each type of rite can be found within television news organizations, and each can be connected to sweeps.

For example: Sweeps can serve as a rite of passage for a new news director or a reporter who has never had the responsibility of producing a series on deadline before; it can be a way of earning one's oats, a "baptism by fire." Sweeps also can serve as a rite of degradation--there are myriad examples of anchors and news directors getting fired for poor performance in the ratings (i.e., poor performance in the sweeps). [1] Sweeps constitute a rite of enhancement when reporters and news organizations win awards for news stories prepared for sweeps; they also present opportunities for organizations to publicly bestow rewards (like promotions) upon personnel who have performed admirably in boosting ratings.

Beyer and Trice (1988, p. 154) note that one rite of renewal in organizations is research, saying that managers and organizations often use social science research as a way of asserting their own rationality and competence and hence their own legitimacy (for examples of the ceremonial use of research in the television industry, see Powers, 1977, pp. 78-94; Gitlin, 1983, chaps. 2-3; Bogart, 1988; Streeter, 1989). In preparing for sweeps, news organizations use market research to determine "what the public wants"; after sweeps, managers can use the ratings books as a way of finding a silver lining in what may otherwise be a gloomy picture (e.g., "We finished last overall, but we're gaining among women between the ages of twenty-five and forty-nine, so we must be doing something right").

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[1] One notable example of this occurred when CBS legal affairs correspondent Fred Graham returned home to Nashville in 1988 to anchor the news at the local CBS affiliate. His contract called for bonuses ranging up to $5,500 for each share point added to the two newscasts he anchored. When ratings did not improve, Graham was removed as anchor. He had lasted a total of fourteen months (Graham, 1990, chap. 16).

Rites of conflict resolution during sweeps can include meetings between news and promotions staff to work out compromises over which kinds of news programming would be best for the sweeps (e.g., "fluffy" consumer-oriented features versus hard-hitting investigative features). And sweeps serve as a rite of integration in that they can unite the various departments and workers in a television station around a single goal: winning, finishing number one.

Sweeps, then, can be seen as a system of rites centered around a single event--the quarterly measurement of the television audience. These rites are "relatively elaborate, dramatic, planned sets of activities"; they are carried out through social interaction; they are performed for an audience; and they have multiple social consequences--the legitimation and degradation of various station personnel, the enactment of a competitive organizational environment and competitive ideology (Ehrlich, in press), and so forth. Moreover, sweeps are not merely an organizational ceremonial but also are an interorganizational ceremonial; they are performed through the interactions of workers from different news organizations, and the interactions of television newsworkers with advertisers, ratings firms, etc. Finally, as I will argue, the content of sweeps series also can serve to legitimate the societal status quo, meaning that sweeps perform a ceremonial function extending well beyond organizational boundaries.

I turn my attention now to two specific kinds of social consequences produced by sweeps--"series sleaze" and "series stress." My study is qualitative and ethnographic in nature, in keeping with other sociological and cultural analyses of news organizations (e.g., Epstein, 1973; Altheide, 1976; Schlesinger, 1978; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979). I base my arguments on interviews and observations related to the production of sweeps series at two television stations in two different markets--a top-twenty market, and a smaller market (ADI 51-100). Given the nature of the methodology and the organizations chosen for study, my findings are not necessarily generalizable to other stations in other markets; nevertheless, as with the studies cited above, I believe this kind of research can offer important insights into the complexities of television newswork.

C. "Series Sleaze"

As we have noted, television news organizations are pressured to prepare special material with high ratings potential to use during sweeps periods. Typically, this special material takes the form of series--multi-segment "special reports" on a single topic airing over consecutive nights. These series usually are promoted heavily on the air, on local radio stations, and in local newspapers; the object, of course, is to attract as many viewers as possible to a given station during the times that audiences are measured and advertising rates are determined. Especially in larger television markets, these "sweeps series" frequently tackle sensationalistic topics, emphasizing sex and scandal. I will refer to the lurid nature of these kinds of reports as series sleaze. "Sleaze" is a pejorative term often used by television critics who view these series and, interestingly, a term I also occasionally heard used by newsworkers themselves in describing their own stations' work.

The top-twenty market station I studied was far from immune to series sleaze. According to a station memo distributed to news personnel before the fall 1990 sweeps, the newsroom was planning series on topics including criminal clergy ("We'll explore what has happened in the past in [town] with priests and other clergymen involved in crimes and deviant behaviors"), black magic ("On the heels of The Exorcist III, we'll be exploring the real [local residents] who believe, and use, these extraordinary religious practices"), X-rated videos ("These videos, presenting an array of repulsive and horrendous scenes, are making the rounds among the junior high set"), capital punishment ("Inmates on death row have committed heinous crimes. But do our viewers want them terminated?"), and other topics that the newsroom apparently felt were too juicy to discuss, even in an in-house station memo ("I hesitate to outline it on paper, because of our competition").

However, if one were willing look beyond the sleaze, one could find important rites of renewal taking place at the station. Sleaze, in the minds of the news managers, was an organizational imperative; they had to engage in sleaze in order to remain competitive with other news organizations in the ratings. Their consultants had told them about ways of "manipulating the meters"--the new Nielsen meters that provided overnight ratings, giving almost instantaneous feedback on how many people were watching the station's news. And the newsroom managers I interviewed told me that their consultants' recommendations had worked; the overnight ratings data had "proven" that sleaze worked as a method of attracting more viewers during sweeps. One manager quoted the news director--his immediate superior--as saying that "sex sells." And, in response to the critics of series sleaze, the newsroom manager continued:

> It's very interesting because you hear the comments, you get telephone calls, you see the articles in the newspapers about how sleazy the series are and that sort of thing. But time and time and time and time and time again--the stuff that gets the highest ratings is the stuff that is, quote, the sleaziest. . . . You hear all this stuff about sleaze, but that's what people want. . . . If we put on a whole series about, uh--(pause)--nursing home problems or how the [local] school district is trying to rebuild itself or something like that, nobody would watch. And yet they sort of insist that we be these white knights. But if we do that, they don't support us. So what are we supposed to do?

The emphasis on giving viewers what they wanted extended to a new method that the newsroom was implementing to select sweeps series topics. As the newsroom manager quoted above described it, the station was gathering together a sort of "focus group" of station employees--not newsworkers, but sales staff, clericals, and other "ordinary" people. Potential series topics were to be submitted to this group to obtain a so-called "salivation factor" (figuratively-speaking), and series selections were to be made on the basis of whichever topics generated the most interest.

In this way, the persons in charge of the newsroom were able to give their decision to engage in series sleaze a veneer of rationality and legitimacy through the data garnered from ratings services, consultants, and "focus groups." They used research as a rite of renewal, as described by Beyer and Trice (1988, p. 154), in order to legitimate themselves to their organizations and their peers. To critics of sleaze--both inside and outside their organization--they could hold up their research data to "prove" that sleaze was necessary and that it worked. They could show that they were acting in their organization's best interests, that they "played to win," that they were worthy of holding positions of power. In this way, sleaze's benefits to the news managers far outweighed the costs in terms of criticism from the newspapers and irate viewers. [2]

However, series sleaze had its critics inside the newsroom as well. At this particular station, sweeps did not act as a rite of "conflict reduction"; if anything, the ratings periods exacerbated tensions in an organizational culture in which tension and conflict are already routine (e.g., Bantz, 1985;

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[2] And, of course, there was always the threat hanging over the managers' heads--if they did not do well in the ratings, they could be fired; the "rite of renewal" easily could become a "rite of degradation."

Carbaugh, 1988). Some of the station's rank-and-file reporters--the ones who were expected to produce the sweeps series--chafed at what they perceived to be the news managers' increasing emphasis on being number one in the ratings, at the expense of being number one in the quality of news coverage. One reporter, who suddenly had been assigned to do a sweeps series on "martial infidelity" that was designed to blunt the ratings success of a similar series on a competing station, took the unusual step of sharing her frustrations with the local newspaper's television critic. She told the critic that the series had been forced upon her: "I told them I did not want to do it. I told them, 'This is going to be terrible, and my name's on it, and I don't like it.'" She added, however: "I thought about whether I wanted to get fired over this and decided it wasn't worth it."

Another reporter told me that he, too, had been forced to do series that he had not particularly wanted to do. One such series during the fall 1990 sweeps had concerned black magic and satanism (the local television critic had dismissed the effort as a "three-part laugher"). The reporter confessed that he had had very little to do with the series' production; he had only been the "voice" for the reports, and in fact never even had bothered to watch the final product on the air. He added that he was considering leaving the station (he in fact did leave not long after), because while the station in the past had "kicked butt" in its daily news coverage, it now seemed to be "floundering." And he was unhappy about the station's obsession with ratings, especially the "overnights":

> Say at ten o' clock, your numbers are down, for whatever reason. And the numbers come in early the next morning, and boy, they're scurrying around the newsroom, trying to figure out how to stop the bleeding. . . . And it just--I don't think--it certainly doesn't help the newsroom. I don't think it helps the viewers to try and "sexy" things up the next night and hopefully get some more viewers into the tent. I just think that overnights ratings thing has really, really hurt journalism throughout the country, because there's so much knee-jerk reaction.

This, then, is an example of how series sleaze encouraged conflict instead of reducing conflict in the newsroom; news managers and reporters clashed over organizational goals and what it meant to be "number one." At the same time, however, sleaze also served as an example of how sweeps can act as a rite of integration. Trice and Beyer (1984, p. 657) note that such rites "encourage and revive common feelings that bind members together and commit them to a social system"; they also "permit venting of emotion and temporary loosening of various norms" at the same time that they "reassert and reaffirm, by contrast, moral rightness of usual norms."

It is not difficult to see how series sleaze serves an integrative function at the institutional or societal level of analysis. Stories about criminal priests or satanic cults or "Housewives as Hookers" do offend people and do appear to violate accepted social norms. Yet these stories also reaffirm people's sense of "moral rightness"--they make people feel normal and virtuous in relation to the "deviance" seen on screen (Shoemaker, 1987). In this way, sleaze can be seen as being conservative in nature; it tends to confirm the social status quo in terms of traditional norms, values, etc.

"Series sleaze," then, is a rather complex and contradictory consequence of the ceremonial of sweeps--encouraging conflict within news organizations at the same time it reasserts managers' claim to power, and testing social norms while ultimately upholding those norms. And it should be added that sleaze is not a necessary consequence of sweeps. Stations, even in large markets, do often present series that represent what most would consider to be a more responsible brand of journalism. For example, the reporter quoted above--the one who was upset about overnight ratings and being assigned to do series that he did not want to do--told me that he had produced a number of investigative series of which he was proud. And he added that he gave much more of himself to those kinds of series, as opposed to daily news assignments:

> Especially on an investigative series, you just pretty much live that series for whatever time you're working on it, two or three or four months or whatever. As opposed to the daily assignment, where, as I say, you just go in, you do it, you forget about it. You do hundreds of those kinds of stories a year. And quite frankly, if somebody comes up to me and says, "Oh, I met you out on such-and-such a story six months ago," chances are great that I won't remember that story at all. (Chuckles) But if they come up and say, "I was a part of a series three years ago," you'll remember that person, because it just means so much more to you, because you've actually lived that thing.

It is this sense of "living a series" which I now will explore. For if sweeps can produce sleaze--work for which reporters care little--sweeps also can produce work for which reporters care a great deal. And yet reporters must produce that work under constraints which can place an enormous amount of pressure upon them.

D. "Series Stress"

"Series stress" is not a term that I have coined, but a term that I heard newsworkers use frequently in the smaller of the two markets I studied. They used the term informally to describe the pressure of creating something out of the ordinary, something that took more than a couple of hours in the field and another hour in the edit bay to produce, something that demanded a more reflective, analytical approach than that required by the "quick and dirty" story typical of daily news coverage. The reporters who had never produced such series before were especially prone to this stress, as one veteran reporter told me:

> People who just start [producing series] get tons of information. We call it series stress. And they get so much information that they can't possibly report on all that information in three parts. So then they're frustrated, because they have all of this wonderful information that the public needs to know, but they don't have time to report it. And so you just really stress out when you do that.

Series stress, then, largely resulted from reporters' attempts to challenge the time constraints intrinsic to their profession--constraints both on the time available to do research, interviews, etc., and the time available on the air for any one story or series. The series format, which originated out of the effort to attract viewers to a given newscast over a period of several nights, did give newsworkers more time to devote to a given topic than they ordinarily had, and somewhat more leeway to interpret that topic. But ultimately their efforts at creativity were constrained by time restrictions and by the norms of their profession.

One reporter's experience provides a useful example of "series stress." The reporter, "Kathy," was African-American and about thirty years old. She was producing her first sweeps series, a report on single-parent households--hardly a sleazy topic. Kathy was fortunate enough to work for a station that historically had dominated the ratings in its market; hence, the news managers saw little need to engage in sleaze to try to boost ratings. [3] The reporter told me that she saw the series both as an opportunity to explore in depth a topic that was close to her heart (she herself was a single parent), and as an opportunity to boost her own career by giving her quality material that she could send to prospective new employers at stations in larger markets.

Inevitably, though, she ran into constraints. First, she was given only one week to research the series, a time during which she also was expected to help with election coverage and other newsroom tasks. Second, she found herself working with several different news photographers, some of whom were inexperienced and

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[3] During the same sweeps period in which Kathy produced her series on single-parent households, the same station also aired series on the state lottery's contribution to education funding, the confidentiality of medical records, and children's physical fitness.

did not produce the quality video that she had wanted. (The newsroom was unwilling to reserve one experienced photographer strictly for her series; there were too many other stories, series, etc. that needed to be shot.) Third, she was given only ten minutes of total air time for the series--four segments of two-and-a-half minutes each. While that was considerably more time than she was used to having for a story, it still was hardly adequate for the complex topic she had chosen to examine.

Finally, Kathy had to cope with the seeming apathy of the station's news managers. In sharp contrast to the top-twenty market, in which managers saw the sweeps series as a prime weapon in the ratings war, Kathy's news managers were convinced that series made little difference one way or another in the ratings. The executive news producer told me that he had tracked the ratings for one series; one segment of the series aired during the newscast that had drawn the highest ratings of the month, and another segment of the same series aired during a newscast that had drawn some of the lowest ratings of the month. I asked him why, then, his station even bothered to air sweeps series:

> Part of it's habit. I mean, we've done it. And we've done, from habit's standpoint, you know--we've done series forever, and it's hard to break that mold, to not do something special and not do something different. . . . But boy, I really do think series don't make that big a difference in viewing habits. I wish we could break the mold.

The same producer, while discussing minor changes his newsroom had made during recent election night coverage, compared election night to a family Christmas celebration--just as a family might decide one year to put the tree in a different place or open presents at a different time, the newsroom had altered its election night routine just for the sake of change, "just so it's not as--boring, I guess." In this way, election night coverage seemed similar to the sweeps series; the news managers viewed both as routine events that in some ways had grown a little tiresome, in contrast to the reporters who seemed to invest more of themselves personally in such events.

Hence, just as in the larger market, sweeps encouraged conflict in terms of what the reporters and the news managers saw as the goal and purpose of the news series. For Kathy, her series served as a rite of passage and, potentially, as a rite of enhancement. The series served as a rite of passage in that it was her first experience in doing research, arranging several different interviews at once, and condensing all her accumulated material into two-minute segments. As the veteran reporter quoted above pointed out, it was precisely the experience of doing all this for the first time that produced so much of the "series stress." (At one point, during a particularly trying evening in the editing room, Kathy snapped: "I never want to do a series again. Ever!") In terms of a rite of enhancement, Kathy made it clear that she hoped to "sell herself" with the series, to try to find a job in a bigger market. The series also offered the opportunity to win professional recognition--other reporters at the same station had won awards for their sweeps series.

But Kathy's goals were different from the news managers' goals. At the top-twenty station, managers had used the series as a rite of renewal, as a way of asserting their own competence and legitimacy. But at Kathy's station, which again had dominated the ratings for years, managers seemed to participate in sweeps series more out of *habit* than anything else. We recall the executive news producer drawing a parallel between election night coverage and a family Christmas celebration, in which changes are made simply to shake up the routine a bit. The comparison could be extended to the station's sweeps series: just as many families celebrate Christmas together because they seem to think that that is what is expected of them, so did the newsroom seem to produce sweeps series simply because that was what news organizations were *expected* to do during sweeps; that was the industry norm.

In this way, from the news managers' point of view, sweeps served as a rite of *integration*. As discussed above, such rites "encourage and revive common feelings that bind members together and commit them to a social system" (Trice & Beyer, 1984, p. 657). In fact, Trice and Beyer (1984, p. 663) use the office Christmas party as an example of a rite of integration. Just as Christmas festivities can bond together members of a family or an organization and help reaffirm their commitment to that family or organization, so did the sweeps series help reaffirm the organizational identities of the station's newsworkers--the feeling that they all were *part* of the organization.

That is not to say that all of the newsworkers were *satisfied* members of the organization (after all, not all members

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of a family are necessarily equally happy to be part of that family!). In Kathy's case, she was frustrated at times by the news managers' seeming lack of interest and support in her series. Yet after it was all over and she had gone through her "rite of passage," she expressed general satisfaction with the finished series and said she hoped she would have the opportunity to do another one soon. In this sense, Kathy's own organizational identity was reaffirmed--she had proven that she could cope with the stress of producing a series and that she could be entrusted with the task of producing another one. Hence, series stress, in acting as a rite of passage, also acted as a rite of integration; it strengthened Kathy's bonds to her occupation and organization.

Finally, there is the content of Kathy's series itself. Again, far from being "sleazy," the series explored Kathy's own experience as a minority and a single mother in a society that traditionally has been inhospitable to such persons. She challenged stereotypes in her reports, extolling the hard work and dignity of African-American women, who head up a significant number of single-parent households. She insisted on using women and people of color as "experts" in her series to counter the impression that "experts" were usually white men. She focused a segment of her series specifically on children, in part to show how our society often ignores children's needs. And she highlighted some of the failings of corporate America--its failure to provide adequate day care for the children of its workers, for example. In short, the sweeps series format did offer Kathy a genuine opportunity to be creative, and she used that opportunity to present a view of American society not often seen on local television news.

But the time limitations, the lack of a single, experienced photographer, and the seeming apathy of the news managers all constrained Kathy's attempts at creativity. Even though her station was much less worried about ratings than the top-twenty market station was, Kathy's station did not, for example, go so far as to grant her a half-hour of air time for a documentary on single-parent families. Instead, the station forced her to condense all her material into four short segments. The usual industry norms prevailed--television news stories are to be short and to the point; anything more than a couple of minutes in length might drive the viewer over to a competitor. The news managers' lack of involvement in the project and their unwillingness to commit a single, experienced photographer also sent a clear signal that this was just one series among many others, just another routine project to be completed as expeditiously as possible. This, too, reflected a "business as usual" attitude that did not challenge industry norms.

The effect on Kathy's series was that while the series did in some ways criticize the societal status quo, it ultimately upheld that status quo. In short, it served as a rite of renewal. Trice and Beyer (1984, p. 657) note that rites of renewal "refurbish social structures and improve their functioning"; they also tend to "focus attention toward some problems and away from others," and thus "legitimate and reinforce existing systems of power and authority." Kathy's reports highlighted dysfunctional aspects of the social structure (the shortage of adequate day care for workers, etc.). The reports did not, however, focus attention toward more deep-seated societal problems like poverty and racism; in fact, the series played up women who were pulling themselves up by the bootstraps and making something of themselves, who were pursuing the "American Dream" as defined by the existing power structure. By emphasizing individual solutions to societal problems, Kathy's series did in fact seem to "legitimate and reinforce existing systems of power."

E. Conclusion

By adopting a cultural studies approach and viewing local television news sweeps as a ceremonial, I have attempted to demonstrate that the ratings periods are a complex cultural expression producing contradictory social consequences. True, they can bring out the worst in local television news, but they also offer news organizations the chance to produce quality journalism. Sweeps series often do violate standards of good taste, but "series sleaze" also performs a socially integrative function by reasserting the "moral rightness" of legitimated social norms. The ratings periods do encourage conflict and stress between newsworkers and their organizations, but they also can integrate those newsworkers back into their organizations and, in so doing, uphold firmly established industry norms and practices.

In short, the sweeps appear to be fundamentally conservative in nature--like other journalistic practices such as "objectivity," the ratings periods mitigate against change both within the television news business and within the rest of society (see Tuchman, 1978). But by encouraging contradictory social consequences, sweeps do offer at least the chance for change. Newsworkers frustrated by the emphasis on "sleaze," for example, may press for more substantive series topics. If it is true that "hardly anyone in local TV news likes sweeps," as a recent article in the RTNDA Communicator asserts (O'Brien, 1991, p. 24), then perhaps in the future we may see the ratings periods diminish in their influence within the news industry and see more of an emphasis on in-depth news stories and series spread out throughout the year.

Still, such change will not come easily. As demonstrated above, whether they "like" the sweeps or not, news managers and reporters do have a significant stake in the ratings periods; participating in the ceremonial of sweeps holds the promise of legitimating managers' place within the organizational hierarchy, enhancing reporters' professional status, and so forth. As a result, mere criticism of the sweeps series as being "sleazy" is not by itself likely to produce change. Change can only result when newsworkers--and top station management and owners--believe that they can derive more benefits from not engaging in sleaze and from producing quality journalism than they can otherwise.

Whether such change can occur without an accompanying fundamental change in the economic structure of the television news industry is open to question. Nevertheless, we as television news scholars still can fulfill our obligation to be of service to the professional community by at least clarifying the circumstances under which sweeps can encourage creative, responsible journalism, and by pointing out the potential benefits of such creativity to newsworkers and news organizations.

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BEHIND THE BLEEPS: ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES AND THE ROLES OF THE NETWORK TELEVISION CENSORS

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Mass Comm and Society Division
AEJMC Annual Convention
Montreal, August 1992

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Introduction

The work of the network television censors has been widely acknowledged in the trade and popular presses, but has not been the object of much academic study.[1] The censors are individuals, employed by departments with names like Broadcast Standards, who review all non-news programming and commercials broadcast by the networks to ensure they meet the networks' guidelines for content acceptability. Early studies, such as George Gerbner's 1959 study of the treatment of the mentally ill by television[2] and Charles Winick's 1961 content analysis of censors' comments,[3] focused on the influence of the censors on program content. Some authors have included descriptions of the censors' work in their larger studies of the television industry. Most notable among this category are Todd Gitlin's in-depth examination of network decision-making,[4] Doug Hill and Jeff Weingrad's history of "Saturday Night Live,"[5] and Kathryn Montgomery's study on the influence of special interest groups.[6] Researchers have found that the censors are primarily concerned with portrayals of sexual behavior, violence, and minority characters. At an institutional level, John Weispfenning has identified the primary roles the censors play for the networks, as both social and economic.[7] But little attention has been paid to the organizational issues of how the censors work and why they do what they do.

To correct this lack of understanding, this paper will attempt to illuminate the how and why of the censors' work by examining the organizational processes and procedures that the censors go through as they fulfill their social and economic roles.

Method

The telephone interviews on which this paper is based were conducted as part of a larger research project done on the roles and responsibilities of the network television censors. This larger research project consisted of analyzing the responses of current and former censors to questions about their backgrounds, their perceptions of their roles within the networks, and their day-to-day work responsibilities. The interview schedule used in this study was a modified version of an instrument developed and used by Muriel G. Cantor in her study of television producers.[8] The modifications consisted of dropping or re-wording questions that were inappropriate to the work of the censors. This resulted in shortening the instrument from sixty-eight questions to thirty-eight questions.

Two approaches were taken to locate censors to interview. First, a letter was sent to a former censor who had written in trade publications about changes in the operations of the standards departments. Second, letters were sent to the heads of the standards departments at ABC, CBS, and NBC. The letters requested the participation of the censor and promised confidentiality. From these initial contacts, other participants were located by asking the censors if they knew others who might be available. Thirteen censors, ten current and three former, were interviewed from May to October, 1991. While this is a numerically small sample, at the time the interviews were conducted, this represented approximately forty percent of those individuals employed as network television censors.

The censors had a combined experience of more than 174 years at ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox. The mean age of the censors who participated in the study was 48 years. The youngest censor interviewed was 35, and the two oldest were 64. Additionally, the "typical" censor began working in the mass media industries in 1968, moving into network television in 1972.

Processes and Procedures

In spite of the severe cutbacks and restructurings in personnel and changes in operating procedures, which the networks underwent between 1986 and 1991,[9] the duties performed by the censors have, for the most part, remained intact. The social responsibility and economic roles of the censors can be divided between watchdog and liaison functions. As watchdogs over content, the censors work with creators to insure that the content meets the standards established by the network. As liaisons, the censors work with other constituencies to gather and disseminate information.

Transcending the boundaries of these roles are two larger processes, negotiation and collaboration. In turn, these two larger processes have grown out of two related factors. The first factor is structural: the censors' position within the networks. By virtue of their structural location within the network, the censors embody the conflict between creativity in production and routinization of control.[10] As such, the censors must work to "balance" the interests of those around them, primarily the programmers and the producers. The second factor is operational. From the early days of television until the mid-1980s, the censors depended on relatively static guidelines to help them make their decisions about content. However, following the staff cutbacks and departmental restructurings, the static guidelines were, for the most part, abandoned. Instead, the censors were expected to make decisions based on both precedent and the exigencies of the individual situation. According to one censor:

> A lot of people think there is a handbook out there

> with the fifteen dirty words you can't say. But unfortunately . . . it's much more fluid. Something that might be allowed on "Saturday Night Live" wouldn't be allowed on "Cosby." You really can't have a handbook or manual as to what goes or doesn't go on the network. It is a lot of subjective calls.

Prior to the cutbacks of the 1980s, the word of the censors was considered final. There was virtually no room for disagreement with the censors' decisions. But beginning in the late 1980s, the economic pressures changed the scope of the censors' control over content. Censors could, in fact, be overruled by those higher in the chain of control. According to the censors interviewed for this study, although this does not happen often, it can happen.

Negotiation

Before the cutbacks, the censors rarely had to explain their reasoning, to either their internal constituencies (programming department executives, program producers, writers, and sales department executives) or their external constituencies (viewers, special interest group members, and government regulators).

Negotiation with the censors' various internal constituencies is based on the different goals assigned by the network to the different groups. The network program executives' function is to develop programs that will attract the largest audience. The program producers' function is to provide programs with the greatest creativity. The censors' function, in relation to the internal constituencies, is to represent the tastes and concerns of the external constituencies, namely the audience and the special interest groups. The process of negotiation allows the censors to satisfy these competing interests in some fashion, without requiring arbitration from above on every disagreement.

To facilitate the process of negotiation, and to prevent being overruled, the censors find that they must present logical arguments for their decisions:

> In the old days, thirty or forty years ago, we could say to a producer, "Look, we can't do that, or the NAB will be all over us." Well, now the NAB [code] has ceased to exist. Or we could throw the big boogieman at them, the FCC. But how much of a problem is that now, with everything that's on the air? It used to be easier because we had a big list of do's and don't's. We just would say to the producer, "NAB, FCC, no, no, no." You can't do that anymore. Now if you say "no" to a producer, you've got to have a damn good reason for saying "no."

In explaining the relationships of the internal constituencies to the standards departments, one of the censors interviewed for this study compared the censors to traffic cops:

> There's . . . a tension between program practices, the network itself, and the outside producer. Basically, the [censor], particularly in Hollywood, functioned as a traffic cop. The limits were set, and you couldn't go more than fifty-five miles per hour, and you had, quite frankly, the outside producers who wanted to go sixty-five or seventy. You had your program executives on the network level that wanted to go, certainly not fifty-five, but probably sixty. And it was the program practices editor and structure that said, "Well, maybe you can go fifty-six or fifty-seven, but you sure as hell can't go sixty-five or seventy."

The degree of subjectivity involved in setting those limits on content places the censor in a difficult negotiating position. The individual censor must decide exactly which elements are potentially offensive and should be modified or eliminated. One of the censors interviewed for this study explained the difficulty in making that determination:

> I told [a program's star] he couldn't say "hot, wet meat" on the air recently, and he went ahead and said it anyway, and then I have to decide whether we want to edit it out. . . . It all kind of depends on how big a battle I want to undertake. Whether I want to keep it a small battle or turn it into a war. For some things I'm willing to go to war. For others, I'm willing to give up for the sake of keeping the producers happy. But it's always kind of a fluid, constant, antagonistic situation.

"Antagonistic," "hostile," "tense," and "conflicting" were the words the censors used to describe their relationships with the producers. One censor explained how he worked around those feelings:

> We have been told many, many times, by many people, "How can you do that job? You have the worst job in television." Because we're the people, the minute [we] walk into the room, or pick up the phone, there's a groan. They think we're going to cause trouble. So what you try to do is . . . gain their trust ahead of time, to work with the creators so they know who you are and respect you for your judgments, and you're not just a blank person on the other end of the phone.

Another censor illustrated the problems inherent in dealing with producers with an example from the 1970s when there was a great deal of public pressure on the networks to reduce the amount of televised violence:

> It was easily the most violent, repugnant western I had ever seen. [The producers] didn't care about story, all they wanted to see was blood and brains, and it was horrific. So we have a meeting following [a public outcry] with [the executive producer]. And in that meeting, we had the head of the network, the head of programming and all his people, none of whom were less

> than a vice president, my boss who was a vice president, and I was the editor . . . and these guys explain to [the producer] that if he continues doing this, they're going to have serious problems with the show, and may have to take it off the air, because the last thing they want is more trouble . . . And [he] assured us, "Fellas, I hear you. Don't worry." A week passes. I get a brand new script. On the first page are the directions: "The scalped trapper lies spread-eagled on the ground, the embers of a dying fire resting upon his blackened crotch." So I called [the producer], and I said, "What are you doing? Our meeting, the violence. . . . " He says, "You're absolutely right. I tell you what, why don't we not show any smoke." You know, that sort of tells you all you need to know about producers.

Although several of the censors interviewed said they found dealing with producers to be frustrating, there was an acknowledgement that it was the nature of their work. In these situations, the words that the censors used to describe their rationale for decisions were "fair," "balanced," and "consistent." As a censor who is assigned to children's programming explained:

> When a controversial issue arises, we do have to present both sides of a question, we have to make sure the producers are being fair and balanced, that they're not serving their own interest or point of view, while not presenting the viewer with an unrealistic picture of an issue that's hot politically. . . . I mean we don't want to offend people on both sides of an argument, and we don't want to be propagandizing our viewers.

The need for avoiding the appearance of arbitrariness was stressed by another censor:

> We tell them what we need, and I think that's the best kind of business relationship we can have . . . that we're consistent and that we can articulate to them what it is that we do, and why it is we do what we do, so they don't come in and feel that they're being treated capriciously.

In addition to fairness, balance, and consistency, several of the censors interviewed for this study stressed the importance of knowing the audience and their expectations as a rationale. One censor, a network vice president, explained audience awareness:

> I make an effort to treat each show the same, with an eye toward the demographics of a particular show. If we have a show that skews particularly young, or is in a family early-evening time slot, then our responsibility increases accordingly to keep innuendo to a minimum, to make it more family-oriented in its approach. So there is an awareness of demographics and time slot. Obviously, the later in the evening, the fewer restrictions exist.

Another censor explained the importance of audience expectations:

> Look at "L.A. Law," which has a huge acceptance by both the audience and the critics, and therefore it's able to do more and take risks, and be a little more on the frontline than another show that doesn't have this acceptance. Therefore, the advertisers and the affiliates and all these people that might object to something in a newer show, would not object to it in "L.A. Law," because they know the audience [will] accept it.

According to two censors, the argument that sometimes persuades producers in the negotiating process is not based on presenting a well-articulated, logical rationale that represents the interests of the audience in matters of taste. Rather, the censors must, at times, use less conventional strategies in presenting their position. The first of these strategies is to enlist the aid of the advertisers, their agencies, or the screeners, as was described earlier in this chapter. By citing the number of advertisers that are likely to withdraw their commercials, the censor is able to replace the interests of the audience with the interests of the advertisers, which may be more compelling to the producer.

In addition to representing the interests of the advertisers, the second strategy is to use unconventional or unexpected arguments. The censor who works on a long-running, popular variety program explained that the predictable standards arguments aren't always a concern of highly-paid stars:

> I started by giving [the star] all the program standards arguments about why these words shouldn't be on. And I could see I wasn't getting to him. I could see that he thought this was someone just coming in, telling him he couldn't tell his jokes. Then I, all of a sudden, turned the conversation. . . . I said, "Are they really funny?" And I said this, taking a gamble, since I knew he had written the joke. . . . And he looked at me, kind of shocked. I said, "They're funny to you, and they're funny to me, because we understand the inside joke, but are they going to be funny to everybody across the country?" And right away [he] turned to [the producer] and said, "He's right. Take it out." And that was the end to that argument. . . . I can tell you an equal number of stories where I've given in, where I've gone to a producer, and I've thought something is impossible, and they've come back and used the same exact methods on me. And I will change my mind and think "you're right. I think the thing you want to do and the way you want to do it would be O.K." You have to go into these things with an open mind. You have to go into these things with the facility of being able to discuss it with them.

Even with a well-planned and well-articulated rationale, the censors said they are often second-guessed by producers, by network programmers, by network administrators, and by other censors. One censor who has worked for two networks elaborated:

> [In] most jobs, you know where your main opposition is going to come from. One of the unfortunate side effects of working in broadcast standards is that the opposition will come not just from writers, producers, and programmers, but it may also come from your own management. . . . So that you never know quite what quarter might be questioned or attacked. . . . Too often management . . . views this as a mystical process, because everybody has an idea about what's right and what's wrong, what's acceptable for television, and what's not. That's one of the problems with this area, is that the decisions that we make, and we make an effort to be consistent, are sometimes questioned by the Monday morning quarterbacks after the calls start coming in.

Another censor with more than twenty years experience in standards noted the difficulties that occur in dealing with network programmers:

> About ninety-eight percent of the meetings I go to, these programmers have no life experience. It's what they've seen on television. They're all college graduates, and they're all very bright, but they have very little life experience. They're qualified to do what they're doing, I suspect, but you get all these ideas, and every once in a while [my colleague] and I will look at each other and think, "Well, all right."

Negotiating with the external constituencies of the network is obviously a liaison function of the censors. In this regard, the censors must maintain contact with viewers, special interest groups, and government regulators. As has already been mentioned, this process of negotiation fulfills two equally important needs of the network. First, the censors are able to gather information about the concerns of the external constituencies. While these concerns may, most often, concern sexual or violent content, there may also be concern about how the networks portray the characteristics of individuals or groups. These concerns are then used by the censors in the evaluation of content. In other words, the censors must represent the concerns of the external constituencies in their negotiations with the internal constituencies. One censor labeled this phase of the negotiating process as "consultation":

> When there are questions where I can use the expertise of someone, we have contacts at the archdiocese, for example, if it's about the Catholic religion. Or members of GLAAD tell us about representation of homosexuals. We have the poison center; I'll call them to see if something that's happening in a script is going to kill people who replicate it. Is this poisonous to kids? So, there are various groups who are glad to help us and be consulted on scripts so we can get the story right, and are represented in a way they can live with.

Second, as illustrated above, the networks also use the process of negotiation to involve the external constituencies in the operations of the network. This makes the external constituencies less likely to object to the content that eventually makes its way into network programming.

The networks are able to execute the process of negotiation from a position of power that allows them confidence in their methods. Although this process may, on its surface, resemble discussion more than negotiation, an awareness of the organizational dynamics involved in the process points directly to the degree of control maintained by the networks. Indeed, it is the maintenance of control that drives negotiation with external constituencies. By developing routine relationships with viewers, special interest groups, and government regulators, the networks can anticipate those issues that have the potential to be economically harmful, and can exert some degree of control over their external operating environment.[11]

While it may appear that viewers, special interest groups, and government regulators carry a great deal of weight to the negotiating process, the censors and the networks have a much more direct link to the source of power in these negotiations. The external constituencies may wish a change in programming, but the network has the power either to grant or deny that wish. As one censor explained:

> If you're asking, do we edit because some group is, or is not, complaining about a film or something we're putting on . . . I think the answer is no. Certainly we listen to what people are saying, and we make decisions based on our own internal feeling of acceptability.

Yes, viewers, special interest groups, and government regulators are able to threaten the network with a smaller audience, advertiser boycotts, and a heightened regulatory atmosphere, but these threats are neither immediate, nor direct. Viewers who are upset with the content of a specific program are rarely able to influence the program's ratings in a meaningful way. In fact, the ratings are just as likely to increase when formerly uninterested individuals view the program to see what the controversy is about.[12] Viewers or special interest groups that threaten advertiser boycotts are taken seriously by the networks, but the ability to produce an effective boycott is limited by the diversity of the advertisers' target audience. Those products that are marketed to a mass audience, as are most of the products advertised on network television, are the products least vulnerable to the threat of boycotts. The threat of government intervention is also limited by diversity. Competing interests within the government regulatory process moderate the ability of complainants to attain regulatory relief. Before additional regulations, or restrictions on content, can be made into law, they must survive legislative or executive hearings, and must withstand possible judicial scrutiny.

Collaboration

While the popular conception of a television censor is the image of a mature man sitting alone with a red button to push whenever a dirty word or picture threatens to appear on the screen, this is a misconception. In addition to negotiation, the complex processes of administering the programming standards is built on a web of collaboration that is made necessary by the high degree of subjectivity involved in applying the networks' standards. As with negotiation, the process of collaboration can be better understood as a combination of both internal and external collaboration. Unlike negotiation, I use internal collaboration to describe the process that occurs among a network's censors, and external collaboration to describe the process that occurs among the censors and program producers and creators.

Internal collaboration functions on three levels: (1) oral transmission of precedent and collective experiences; (2) a check on the censors' judgments against the judgments of peers; and (3) a process of voluntary review of judgments by supervisors. This third level is deliberately distinguished from the normal managerial oversight imposed by supervisors. It should also be noted here that the quantity of collaboration at a particular network may vary due to organizational factors.

At the first level, the process of collaboration allows censors to transmit knowledge of past situations, to pass along the shared experiences and insight of the networks' censors. A censor who works with two other very experienced censors explained the importance of this level of collaboration:

> We have questions, and I'll ask [my colleague] if he ever had this word . . . this phrase. "Have you ever approved this phrase? This word?" We do that all the time. . . . We go up and down the hall . . . "Have you ever heard this on TV? Did you approve this?" We want to be standard. We want to standardize our decisions, and so in some areas when I'm not sure what our present policy is, I want to make sure that I'm consistent.

One of the experienced censors mentioned above also explained the importance of sharing experiences:

> [My colleague] and I will have conversations about our experiences, the two of us. It goes back between the two of us, we have almost eighty years of standards experiences, and we're talking one, two, three, four different networks. I'll go in and say, "What do you think of this." So we'll boodle it around.

The second level of internal collaboration allows the censors to check their opinions against their peers'. While this is similar to the first level of collaboration, the checking of opinions on contemporary content can and should be distinguished from sharing past experiences. One censor explained the informality of the second level of internal collaboration:

> It's not a rigid, linear procedure. It's very collegial, in the sense that we often just go to who is handy, whoever will give us an objective answer. If they'll tell us we're overreacting, or indeed something is a problem, or if their evaluation of the context is similar to yours. You don't really feel that you're out there all by yourself with an opinion that might be too subjective.

Another censor commented on the amount of collaboration:

> That aspect of the job is ever-present. It happens all the time. You ask them, "What do you think of this?" Or "What do you think of this scene?" Or "How would you feel if someone said this?" There's, I'm very pleased in this department, there's very much a free flow of discussion with other people about something you might not be sure about, or have a question about . . . concepts or ideas or specific portrayals.

While the first level of collaboration works to transmit the experiences of censors, the second level of collaboration attempts to draw upon the backgrounds and attitudes of the various censors. One censor, a network vice president, explained the importance of getting input from a varied staff:

> It's good to have this kind of multi-faceted point of view. I have, here in the department . . . a variety of religious backgrounds, and ethnicity. . . . So we get different inputs and different points of view, and it helps to have that. I think that's healthy. Our own creativities, no matter who [we are] are relatively circumscribed by our own experiences, and so the

different life experiences contribute to the process.

The third level of internal collaboration allows the censors to check their judgments with their supervisors. This third level is also commonly referred to as "bumping it up." Several of the censors interviewed for this study noted that the third level of collaboration was used on a voluntary basis by the censors. In other words, a supervisor would not render an opinion or judgment unless invited by the censor:

> They're my call. . . . If there's a particular problem, I'll usually tell my boss the next day just to get her read on it. I can pretty much do what I want to do. Sometimes the production companies and I are in agreement over things. If we're not in agreement, then it goes to supervision, but it's self-imposed. I'll bump it up, just to placate the producer.

One censor, who supervises a staff of censors, elaborated on the third level of internal collaboration from the supervisor's viewpoint:

> I don't necessarily read what the editor is reading. That person is the gatekeeper and has the authority to make the decisions. I don't get into it unless I'm requested to, or it's obvious to me it'll be a major battle, and I'll need some support from my higher-ups.

Another censor, who is a supervisor, explained:

> If there's a real stalemate about getting the note [written comments for the producer] accomplished, then I have the authority to insist one way or the other to the producer. It just helps, I think, in terms of backup, and it helps all of us. . . . We keep the decision-making here at the level of the manager, with the idea that you don't rely entirely on your own opinions.

Just as the level of autonomy enjoyed by the censors varies by the organizational dynamics of a particular network, the quantity and quality of internal collaboration may vary. NBC, by virtue of its demolition and subsequent rebuilding of standards in 1988, has very little of the first level of collaboration, that which transmits experiences and precedent. One NBC censor noted the "considerable turnover" in personnel that occurred in the late 1980s, which reduced the number of the "old guard" who had a knowledge of specific departmental history. Although, according to this censor, the consequences of this loss have been "non-existent."

The second area of collaboration for the network television censors is external to the standards departments, and is an outgrowth of the process of negotiation that occurs between censors and program producers. This external collaboration takes place between censors and program producers and creators as the censors attempt to shape the program content to make it conform to the networks' standards. While the censors are seen by producers as "naysayers," they view themselves as a part of the creative process. A censor, who is also a vice president, explained:

> There are many levels of satisfaction. Sometimes it is working with a production entity: writers, producers, directors who have a vision about a particular subject, and an important subject, who are able to successfully bring that vision to the screen. . . . My particular reward is having a part in that in some small way. And sometimes the participation can be very major. We aren't simply people who say "no." We often say "yes." And if not strictly "yes," oftentimes [it's] "well perhaps we could do it this way."

Another censor explained that it isn't really the responsibility of the censors to provide solutions to creative problems concerning objectionable content, but it does happen:

> We'll simply say, "this is a problem. Come at it from an alternative way." So that [the producers] are the ones being paid to do that. And in fact, many producers jealously guard the gates of creativity. So they express resentment or a desire not to have us express suggestions. Sometimes producers who've worked with us for a while will solicit our ideas. So that [can be] a sensitive area. We have to feel our way with producers. Generally, as a broad overview, I would say we start off with the position that we're not going to offer creative suggestions as to how something might be done. Then, over a period of time, it may be they'll say, "Do you have any ideas?" And we may, or we may not.

One censor said that the standards staffs sometimes "force" creators in a positive direction:

> On many occasions by exercising our editing function, we're forcing more creativity. Everybody gets into habits, and certain habits are ways of doing things that are shortcuts. And writers, producers, and programmers are as subject to that weakness as any of us, so we tend to get into some hackney kinds of things, short-cut innuendo, the weight of the quick laugh that may be inappropriate for audience demographics or timeslot, so we force them into a little more creativity.

Another censor noted the importance of distinguishing between a relationship based on negative feedback and a relationship based on positive feedback:

> Say [a producer] wants to do something . . . outrageous. Well it's our function to put things in proper perspective. Not to hold them back. . . . That's one reason I've succeeded. I have a lot of friends who are producers and creators, and I don't mean to brag, but I feel I have a good reputation among producers, and one reason for that is, I look at it positively. I don't look at myself as somebody who's there to blow the whistle, to say, "no, you can't do that, you can't do it." I always look at something

with the approach, "how can we do it."

Conclusions

In applying the networks' subjective standards of content acceptability, the censors rely on two complex processes, negotiation and collaboration. These processes allow the censors to routinize their relationships with their constituencies and to bring a measure of control to the creative process. Although the networks' influence as providers of mass audience entertainment is in decline,[13] the censors present a model for those media organizations that must rely on the maintenance of complex relationships with a variety of constituencies, particularly if advertisers are among the constituencies.

Notes

[1] I use the term "censors" cautiously. Network standards editors refer to themselves in a variety of ways. Notwithstanding the other available terms, "censors" has been used in both professional and lay circles, and is used in this study because it is widely understood.

[2] George Gerbner, "Mental Illness on Television: A Study of Censorship," Journal of Broadcasting 3 (1959): 293-303.

[3] Charles Winick, "Censor and Sensibility: A Content Analysis of the Television Censor's Comments," Journal of Broadcasting 5 (1961): 117-135.

[3] Todd Gitlin, Inside Prime Time (New York: Pantheon, 1983).

[5] Doug Hill and Jeff Weingrad, Saturday Night: A Backstage History of 'Saturday Night Live' (New York: Beachtree/William Morrow, 1986).

[6] Kathryn C. Montgomery, Target: Prime Time (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[7] John Weispfenning, "Television Self-Regulation: A Case for Network Standards and Practices," Mass Comm Review 17 (1990, no. 3): 36-37.

[8] Muriel G. Cantor, The Hollywood TV Producer: His Work and Audience (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 211-218.

[9] For a thorough discussion of the changes that have taken place at the television networks, see Ken Auletta, Three Blind Mice: How the TV Networks Lost Their Way (New York: Random House, 1991).

[10] See Joseph Turow, Media Industries: The Production of News and Entertainment (New York: Longman, 1984), 149-186.

[11] Weispfenning, 36-37.

[12] See Mark Lasswell, "Crusade or Charade?" Rolling Stone, 4 May 1989, 33.

[13] Kenneth R. Clark, "Independent TV Stations Claim Credit for Network Decline," Chicago Tribune, 4 September 1991, sec. 3, 1.